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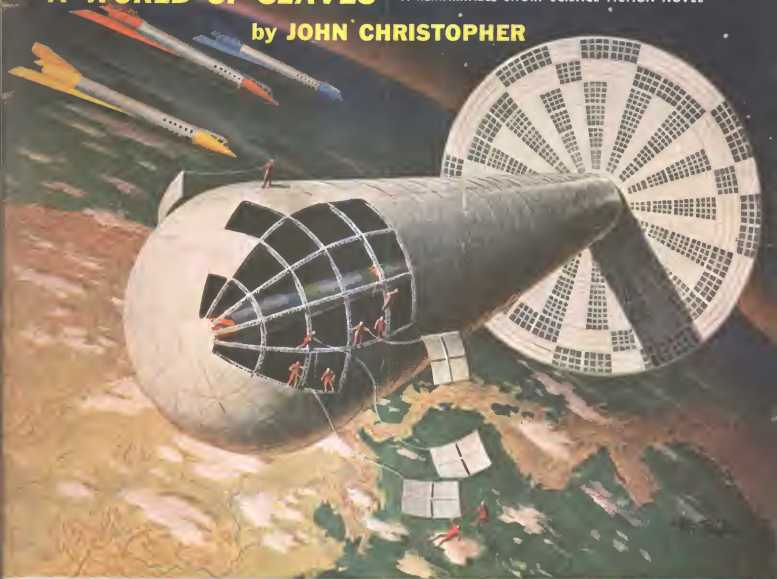
MARCH
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THE BEST IN SCIENCE FICTION

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A WORLD OF SLAVES — A REMARKABLE SHORT SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

by **JOHN CHRISTOPHER**



AT YOUR OWN RISK

A Complete Novellet by **STANLEY MULLEN**

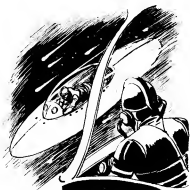
CYRANO deBERGERAC:

Swordsman of Space by **SAM MOSKOWITZ**

From — **DEPARTMENT OF LOST STORIES** — Two Short Stories

THEODORE STURGEON

• **RAY BRADBURY**



THE NEW ERA

With this issue SATELLITE appears for the second time as a monthly. And we think you'll agree that its greatly enlarged size has made possible the kind of improvement which everyone in the entertainment field is constantly striving for, sometimes subconsciously, sometimes in direct response to audience perceptiveness. Even a subconscious striving has its value, but we like to think that the new SATELLITE has come into being largely because you, the readers, have exercised a guiding influence in demanding an increased prominence for science fiction on the newsstands.

Size alone may have no direct bearing on the quality of a magazine in a strictly literary sense. But in the field of science fiction—too long denied its right to stand shoulder to shoulder with the popular-audience headlines in other fields—it does make a difference. It makes a difference because the popularity of science fiction has been growing steadily for years and with the advent of our Earth Satellite Era only a large-sized magazine can do full justice to its importance as a *major entertainment medium*.

There's another avenue of improvement made possible by the larger format which we'd like to stress. Science fiction thrives on variety, scope. Indeed, its subject matter is as varied in scope as the Atomic Age itself. And an enlarged format gives a science fiction magazine more room for experimentation—the introduction of new features, new departments, and cover illustrations with a far, far greater imaginative sweep and depth and accuracy of detail.

Last month we introduced a new feature—*Department of Lost Stories*. This month it soars to new heights with a Ray Bradbury story so hauntingly, compellingly unusual that it is certain to become an object of controversy, and a Theodore Sturgeon story just as startlingly "different" in theme. And the short novel which we're running complete in this issue—we believe you'll approve of the new, slightly shorter length—should mark a milestone in science fiction publishing. In "A World of Slaves" John Christopher has captured all of the suspense and terror, the strangeness and wonder and fierce, dark beauty that made "No Blade of Grass" so incomparable a reading pleasure when it appeared serially in *The Saturday Evening Post*.

And our thanks go out to the many fans and readers who've deluged us with mail ever since the first announcement in our last digest-size SATELLITE and the appearance, last month, of our first Giant-Size SATELLITE.

We'll keep at it. You just keep on enjoying the magazine—and tell a friend.

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SATELLITE

science fiction

MARCH, 1959

Vol. 3, No. 4

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The mechanical monsters were as terrifying as the Martian invaders in H. G. Wells' WAR OF THE WORLDS. But their origin was not Martian and no "germ miracle" could save mankind.

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How You Can Master GOOD ENGLISH

— — *In 15 Minutes a Day*

THOUSANDS of persons make mistakes in their everyday English—and don't know it. It is surprising how many persons fail in spelling such common words as "business," "judgment," "beneficiary," and "receive"; say "between you and I" instead of "between you and me"; use "who" for "whom"; and mispronounce the simplest words. And it is equally astonishing how few know whether to use one or two "c's" or "m's" or "s's" (as in "recommend" or "disappoint"), or when to use commas in order to make their meaning absolutely clear. Most persons use only common words—colorless, flat, ordinary. Their speech and their letters are lifeless, dull, humdrum, largely because they *lack confidence* in their use of language.

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But now Sherwin Cody offers you a common-sense method of acquiring a mastery of English in only a few minutes a day. It's so easy for you to stop making the mistakes in English which have been hindering you and learn to present your ideas clearly, forcefully, convincingly, on all occasions—*without even thinking about it!*

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Even more recently, in the schools of Colorado Springs, an experiment was conducted under the supervision of Dr. F. H. Bair, then Superintendent of Schools in that city. Dr. Bair kept part of the school system under the old method of English instruction and put two elementary schools and one of the Junior High Schools (about seven hundred pupils in all) under the Cody method.

Results were astounding! In his report at the end of the experiment, Dr. Bair states, in part, "The general results as shown by the statistical summaries and by the materials that I looked over were astonishing. It will be seen that the experimental schools in every case gained very sharply over the control schools. It would appear that Mr. Cody has come upon an idea and to some extent a procedure almost revolutionary in the teaching of English."

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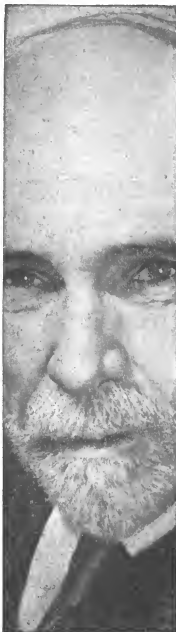
The basic principle of Mr. Cody's method is habit-forming. Suppose he himself were standing forever at your elbow. Every time you mispronounced or misspelled a word, every time you violated correct grammatical usage, every time you used the wrong word to express your meaning, suppose you could hear him whisper: "That is wrong, it should be thus and so." In a short time you would habitually use the correct form and the right words in speaking and writing.

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**A GREAT SHORT
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A WORLD OF SLAVES

He was a man apart, alone . . . knowing full well that the success or failure of his mission would determine Mankind's future under the stars. The cities were depopulated, in ruins, and all of the splendors and triumphs of human civilization were at the mercy of a horror unspeakable.

by JOHN CHRISTOPHER

The Man Who Wrote **No Blade of Grass**

PROLOGUE

AS LIGGARD AWOKE, George's words were echoing in his mind: "You'll be a museum specimen, Stan. Probably in a glass showcase . . . attendants in white smocks . . . admission fifty cents—free on Saturdays and Sundays. And a doctor checking that two-an-hour pulse every few days. That's how it should be. But just in case—in case we're being too optimistic—there's the blast exit. I hope you won't need it."

He blinked his eyes clear of a film of dust. The underground chamber they had constructed was unchanged; the dust was on it, softening the outlines everywhere, but it was unchanged. George's chair still stood by his desk in one corner. He walked across to it on uncertain legs. The log lay open; the pencilled writing clear enough under the layer of grey:

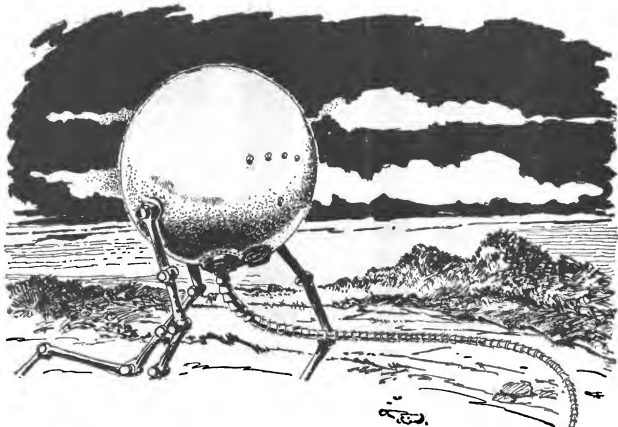
Thursday. January 17. Everything normal.

Pulse and blood suitably retarded. This marks six months from the beginning; I'll give him another few weeks before publishing. After that I don't suppose I'll be able to get near him for visiting celebrities.

That was all. A routine statement. No broken message trailing off into cryptic uncertainty. But he hadn't come back. A fatal accident? But there had been full details among his papers; the executors must have found them. Liggard looked round the small cell again. Clearly they hadn't. So a lot depended on the blast exit.

The mechanism seemed in order. He primed it, flicked the control, and retired to crouch behind the brick blast wall. He counted aloud, listening to his own voice echoing, so unlike the welcoming voices they had expected:

"One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . ."



The explosion cracked sharply through the air and fresh dust, swirling up, made him cough. He looked up. As he did his nostrils caught the scent of fresh air. There was the light of day, too, breaking in on the dim artificial illumination that his awakening had switched on. The blast exit had worked. The way was open; a small tunnel leading upwards. He squirmed his way through it and out onto a green hillside, on what seemed like a late summer afternoon.

I

THE COTTAGE HAD BEEN CHOSEN for its location—a mile and a half from the city limits, on a slope sufficiently elevated to protect the cell from any ordinary flooding. The cottage still stood a few yards further up the hill, or rather its skeleton did. It had sagged in on itself, it seemed, through the ordinary dilapidations of time.

Liggard looked the other way, towards the city. At first sight it seemed not to have changed. He could see the glint of the river, could see that the Consular Bridge still spanned it, or almost spanned it. His eyes caught a gap, just short of the east bank. And the Civic Building—when he examined it more carefully he saw that the top was crumpled, as though some giant had placed a hand on it and carelessly pushed it down. Other buildings, when he came to look at them, were also incomplete.

War? It seemed obvious enough. Misleadingly obvious, perhaps. There was damage, but hardly the kind that would have resulted from a universal holocaust. But radiation sickness—bacteriological



warfare? That might account for much of what he saw. He watched the city. Yes, it was deserted.

He went down, anyway, to check. Before the sun set, he had confirmed his guess, but he was no

nearer to finding the reason for the desertion. There were no skeletons. He camped for the night on the crumbling counter of what had been a chain grocery. He found some canned provisions but not many, another thing which surprised him.

From his couch he could see, through splintered windows, the brilliant night sky. If this city was deserted, was there any reason for him to expect any better luck in other places? Obviously not, if he were looking for the kind of civilized life he had left behind him a hundred years ago in the twentieth century. But he refused to allow his disappointment to blind him.

Deserted cities didn't necessarily mean the end of Man. He remembered the flies, the mosquitoes, the cockroaches that had been attacked with D.D.T. There was always the odd, resistant strain in the breed. Somewhere there would be men—if only a handful, if only savages. And he would find them all right. It might take him a long time, but he would find them.

He rolled over, finding a more comfortable position on the pitted wood, and went peacefully to sleep.

He rose early the next morning. The weather was still pleasant. He packed a dozen cans in his knapsack and set out, heading eastwards, away from the skeleton of the city. Provisionally he laid his course for New York, but not with any expectation of finding it inhabited. When he found men he knew it would be by chance, by stumbling on the isolated community that had escaped whatever pestilence had stalked across the planet. But there had to be a mark to aim at, and New York was as good as any.

He thought of getting hold of some kind of vehicle since the roads seemed to be in tolerably good condition—a bicycle perhaps. But he realized the stupidity of that idea when he looked at the car in a garage on the road out from the city. It had been well sheltered, but it was no more than a pattern of rusts. He walked on as cheerfully as possible, thinking of the distance he might yet have to walk.

His surprise was all the greater when, no more than half an hour after he had left the city behind him, he reached the brow of a small hill, and looked down onto a neat pattern of well-tilled fields, dotted with small, roughly built houses. He stood for several minutes looking at the view, and trying to disbelieve it.

There had been people who had wanted men to turn their backs on the cities and return to the land, he remembered. But the idea that a large number of people might have acted on their advice still seemed fantastic, despite the evidence of the city behind him and the thriving agricultural land in front. He looked at the scene more closely. The houses were spaced roughly at the corners of squares which measured about two miles across.

They were small holdings, and at the corner of one of the nearer squares, nine or ten houses huddled into a tiny village. With this as his new objective, he set off down the hill.

It was about three miles away, and he had covered approximately half the distance towards it when he heard the hooting. It was a sound not un-

like a ship's whistle, and with the same staccato intervals. Automatically his ear registered the direction of sound, and he turned round to look for it. Something was following him, and rapidly narrowing the distance that separated them.

The key feature was the spherical cabin, carried at a height of about twenty feet from the ground on three metal legs that seemed to be jointed in at least half a dozen places. The cabin seemed to be windowless but was studded with various minor features, some of which might have been lookouts. Three metallic-looking fronds were curled up beneath it.

The whole machine advanced rapidly on its jointed tripedal locomotory apparatus. At a rough guess, he estimated its speed to be a little less than thirty miles an hour. Fearful that it might miss him he stood in the middle of the crumbling roadway, waving his arms vigorously.

As the machine got within twenty yards of him one of the fronds beneath the cabin unrolled into a segmented metal tentacle, perhaps twenty-five feet long. It swung viciously towards him, and even as he ducked abruptly out of its way his mind merely accepted the possibility of some clumsy mismanagement of the controls.

He only began to suspect there might be some hostility about the machine's intentions when a second tentacle unrolled and flung its savage steel at him with a fury that made the air whirl about him. He threw himself towards the edge of the road, tumbled over a parapet, and felt himself falling helplessly.

When he recovered, he saw that he was lying at the bottom of a steep crevasse. There had been a land slip at some time and a fissure, perhaps ten or twelve feet deep, ran for several yards between the dilapidated road and the scrub country beside it.

He looked up. The machine was straddling his refuge. Far up against the blue arc of sky the spherical cabin swayed in motion as the machine settled its legs on either side of the crevasse. The tentacles lashed down at him, but cut the air five feet over his head. They weren't long enough to reach him.

For two or three minutes they whipped to and fro above him. Then, just as rapidly, they curled up again and with a convulsive jerk the machine passed across his field of vision, and out of sight. He heard its hooting resumed, and heard it grow fainter with distance. By the time he had climbed up the rocky slope to the road again, it was about a mile away.

He stood watching it. Its jerky but rapid motions were carrying it towards the group of houses he had himself been heading for. It approached them without slackening pace. Tiny now, but distinct in the clear air, he saw it pass over the buildings, apparently brushing unconcernedly against them. He thought he saw one of the tentacles uncurl to wave briefly in some motion, but he was too far away to be sure.

The machine disappeared into the distance. He continued his own journey, his mind still more confused and wondering. Presently the buildings grew larger, and he slackened his pace.

He saw men and women as he drew near to the

cluster of houses. He saw the damage, too. The side of one of the houses had been ploughed open, presumably by one of the machine's tripod legs, and people were grouped about it. He noticed they were dressed in roughly woven, handmade clothes. He walked towards them, conscious that his own dramatic arrival from the twentieth century might be somewhat marred as far as these people were concerned by the pressing catastrophe of their own immediate affairs. He heard their raised voices as he drew near, and paused to listen. George's guess that the English tongue was unlikely to alter much in the next hundred years had at least been borne out.

A small man with a shrill voice—he looked about forty—was saying: "Yeah, it's the same one. He's extraordinarily vicious. It's the same one, all right. I couldn't mistake him."

Liggard found himself on the edge of the group, but they weren't taking any notice of him. He began to say something—anything to hear his own voice speaking to other men—but the others were too busily discussing the damage to the cottage to pay him any attention. Or most of them were. But a grey-haired man, tall, with a lean face, came round to stand beside him.

The tall man said quietly: "Stranger in these parts?"

Stanley Liggard nodded. "It's a long story. A difficult and an incredible one. I don't suppose you'll believe me."

The other pursed his lips into a wry smile. "I believe easily. Come on in and have a drink, anyway. It won't be back."

A girl joined them. She was slightly built, with a pleasant but rather strained face. Her hair was glossy brown, and curly. She wore a simple red dress.

Liggard said: "You called that metal monster 'it.' Hasn't it a name? I never saw anything quite so unnerving—"

The stranger looked at him with real curiosity. "You don't know what that was? You *do* interest me."

They went through a low doorway into a small, square, stonewalled room. It looked like the inside of a colonial-period farm-house. Its original owner had apparently been antiquarian-minded. There was even a rack of churchwarden pipes on the wall behind the bar that stretched across the room and barred the way to the rest of the house. A woman was cleaning glasses on the other side of it.

The stranger went over and drew three glasses of tap beer. He paid for the drinks in heavy coins that rang on the wood.

He brought the glasses over to the table beneath the small square window, at which Stanley Liggard and the girl were already sitting.

"My name's Coolen. Luther Coolen. My daughter, Patience."

"Stanley Liggard." He looked at them speculatively. "I still think it's going to be difficult," he said. "I can't expect you to believe me."

Patience had a brittle-sounding voice, with a harshness that was in a way attractive. "If you don't know what the Meccanoes are," she said, "you must have been hiding some place."

He drank from the glass. The beer was dark and heavy—a brew with body to it.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you could say I've been hiding."

He told them his story as simply as possible, glancing at their faces at intervals to watch disbelief creeping in. But it didn't. Luther Coolen continued to look at him with bland acceptance, the girl with rather more interest, but also without comment.

"Now," he finished, "You can tell me what kind of world I've returned to."

The girl echoed bitterly: "What kind of a world?"

Luther Coolen said thoughtfully: "I wonder what happened to your friend George? He may have been killed in one of the first panics. Or perhaps entirely by accident—and the panics began before anybody could pay attention to his papers and come and find you."

Stanley said: "The panics?"

"In your time," Luther said, as if confirming something, "the world was divided between two power blocs. It looked as though another atomic world war was in preparation?"

Liggard nodded. "No doubt about that."

"People on this side of the world didn't know much about what the others might be planning. They were believed to be surpassing us in war-making potential. And they were, of course. But they were onto other things, too, especially in the field of cybernetics?"

Stanley nodded again. "Servomechanisms—electronic brains."

"Electronic brains. A lot of work had been done on them here. Some people talked of it as the second technological revolution. The first had largely dispensed with the need for human labor. The second would cut out the white collar workers in a hundred thousand different fields of organization and accountancy."

Stanley remembered something. "More than that! Someone said there was no reason why machines shouldn't write poetry. A joke, I guess."

Luther smiled awkwardly. "It turned out to be a bad joke. The Russians were on it, too. They had one man—a fellow called Kronz. We don't know much about his career in Russia though he had had a brilliant one as a physicist in western Europe before he had the bad judgment to go back to his Russian homeland on a holiday. They kept him. There were reports after that. He was supposed to be working on a super cosmic-ray bomb and half a dozen times he was reported dead. Actually they couldn't do anything with him. He wasn't to be intimidated, and the only chance of his paying a dividend was for them to leave him strictly alone. Eventually they did."

"And on his own he turned to cybernetics. Whether out of real interest in a field quite unrelated to his early work or whether out of despair and cynicism about mankind we'll never know now. When he started getting results he was encouraged, of course. I don't know what his superiors thought he was giving them. Probably robot soldiers, giant remote-control tanks—all that kind of useful play-

things. He asked for supplies of the precious plutonium—and they gave them to him.

"Then he built his Brain. We know it's plutonium-activated; and that's about all we do know about it. We know there's only one. These tripod arrangements that scavenge the countryside are in some kind of radio communication with the main center. The country people credit them with individual personalities, but they're all part of the Brain. It was the Brain that swiped at you in the ditch, and kicked half a house in here."

Stanley said: "And Kronz? He couldn't control it?"

Patience Coolen said: "From what we've learned about it since, probably the first thing the Brain did was to pluck his arms and legs off. It's one of its favorite pastimes."

Stanley said: "I get the impression that the Brain is vindictive. Surely a machine can't be—emotional?"

"It's an interesting point", Luther agreed. "Purely as a guess, I should say that it's fascinated by *gesture*. That's something we take for granted; as an automatic part of all animal life, and especially of men. Smiles, frowns, waving arms—all the translations into the physical of mental processes are commonplace to us. But not to the Brain. It never tires of probing men for reactions, in a way that appears casual but may be just the opposite. It's one of the things we've got that it can never have. You can understand its interest."

"And the deserted cities?" Stanley asked.

"Cities," Patience said, "are one of the things it can prevent us having."

"The first information the western world had," Luther explained, "was when the Meccanoes plunged across most of Europe and started kicking Paris and London and Berlin to pieces. It was taken for Russian aggression, of course. One or two Russian cities were destroyed by atom bombs before the Meccanoes reached them. As a matter of fact, it was several months before it was realized that the whole business wasn't a Russian avalanche. And by that time, mankind was on the run. It had become very clear that the Brain regarded cities as a natural hunting ground. And in any case, once the Meccanoes had succeeded in breaking up the fabric of civilization—of city-civilization—mankind's only hope lay in getting out into the country."

Stanley's imagination was caught. "The population of the world's cities pouring out into the surrounding country. That must have been—"

"Hell," Patience supplied for him. "In ten years the world population dropped from two billion to something probably nearer two million. And for the overwhelming majority of deaths the Brain was only indirectly responsible. It supplied the conditions for men to starve to death—to tear each other to pieces for a loaf of bread or the carcass of a rabbit."

"It could have wiped us right out, of course," Luther said. "There's no way of really getting at whatever obscure thought processes go through it. It seems as though the spectacle of man interests it. At least it leaves us reasonably well alone; as long as we don't form too large a group. And except for the Hunts."

"The Hunts?" Liggard asked.

"The Meccanoes hunt every now and then," Patience said. "They hunt men as men once hunted foxes. And they treat them in much the same way when they catch them. They don't eat us. But men didn't eat foxes either, did they?"

"It doesn't seem credible," Stanley said uncertainly. "Wasn't there any attempt to stop it at the beginning?"

"There were attempts," Luther said grimly. "Tanks and airplanes. But their crews were human, and the Meccanoes aren't. If the Air Force had succeeded in dropping an atom bomb on the Brain itself, that would have finished things. But they didn't. And every human plane shot out of the sky represented a trained crew written off, while the Meccanoes, the arms and legs of the Brain, could be repaired almost as fast as they were hit, and replacements were always pouring out. There was only one end to that kind of war. And since the cities were abandoned . . ."

"There's no way of fighting it? No way at all?"

"Look at them!" Luther said.

The people had begun to come in from outside. They stood by the bar, talking and arguing in a desultory, hopeless fashion.

The small man with the shrill voice said: "Reckon they might leave us alone now. Reckon we might get the harvest in before there's any more trouble."

"They take things for granted," Luther said. He paused. "Yes, there is something. Not very much, but something. If you feel like coming in on it, we'd be glad of your help. Anyway, you might as well travel with us until you get your bearings. It's a feudal world now, and you're without a niche. They wouldn't let you stay here. The ground's all marked out."

"What do you do?" he asked.

"We're peddlers," Patience said. "Hucksters!"

"We make a little," Luther said. "Three can live on it almost as well as two. There are few luxuries left in this world, anyway. Well?"

"I'm very grateful," Liggard felt the enormity of understatement in his words. He had a lot to be grateful for.

Luther drained his beer. "We'll have a meal here. Then we'll get on our way. We should reach the next village before night. That Meccano has destroyed our lodging here."

II

THEY HAD A DONKEY STABLED behind the inn. It was a young, sturdy beast. They hitched the double pack of goods on it and set off, Luther leading the donkey and Stanley and Patience walking beside him.

"You'll have to get used to walking," Patience said.

He followed her glance to his own feet, shod in light, pointed shoes.

Luther said: "We'll get you something stronger at the next village."

They walked for some time in silence through the still hot afternoon. The donkey padded steadily on, stirring a small cloud of white dust in which the smaller clouds raised by their own feet merged and were lost. Liggard felt unaccustomed aches

pulling at his muscles, but there was satisfaction also in the monotonous regularity of physical effort.

He said once: "You say there's some way of attacking the Brain—of getting at it?"

"The Brain itself is a bit of a traveller," Luther said. "At present it's on this continent; in what used to be Philadelphia."

"And it has a weak spot?"

Luther glanced at him briefly. "I think so. That can wait, though. We'll have plenty of time to talk it over before we get within reach."

Liggard said nothing. He approved Luther's caution; it made it more probable that he really had something useful in mind.

The ground became more broken. The path they were following led over a hillside on which sheep were grazing, but at this point there wasn't a single farmhouse in sight. At the top of the hill, however, Patience pointed down into the valley before them. Shadows were falling more squarely with the approaching evening and the valley itself was in the shade.

Stanley could see the small huddle of houses in the distance. He was going to say something when Luther broke in: "You hear that?"

Patience nodded slightly, her gaze preoccupied. Stanley listened. He heard it himself, a faint but quickening sound across the quiet air. The staccato hooting.

Liggard looked at Luther. "The Meccanoes?" he asked.

The hooting was perceptibly louder, and he realized with a shock that it was on more than one note and that the intervals overlapped.

"Yes, the Meccanoes," Luther said. "We're unlucky."

Patience had been looking about her. "A dip over there—about a hundred yards. It doesn't look very promising, but . . ."

Liggard nodded in quick agreement.

Luther had already begun to urge the donkey in the direction she had indicated. The hooting behind them became louder. Suddenly the air was torn with a gale, blowing up over the brow of the hill. The wind shrieked at them; they had to fight their way across it. The temperature had dropped fantastically.

Across the howling wind, Patience shrieked in his ear: "They have weather control. They often exercise it on a Hunt. God knows why, but it amuses them."

The whole sky had darkened and he became aware of the sting of hail plucking at his flesh. The three of them stumbled down into the hollow; he could see it wasn't going to be very much protection. Behind them the hooting rose into a pizzicato wailing. Luther pulled the donkey to its knees, and the three of them huddled beside it for shelter.

"This was really bad luck," Luther said. "We haven't been caught in a hunt for two years. If they haven't found a quarry yet they may sweep right past us; they're more likely to flush someone down towards the village."

Liggard's mind still refused to accept the implications of the situation, or of a world in which such a situation could be commonplace.

"But why?" he said, almost angrily. "I don't get it.

If the world were being bossed by superintelligent cats I could understand it. But machines!"

He felt Patience's body tense beside him. "Quiet now," she said. "They'll be close."

He could feel himself the vibrations in the ground underneath them; the thud of stamping metal feet ascending the other side of the hill. He craned his head over the side of the donkey, peering through what was now a blizzard of snow and biting ice. There was light in the sky; a glow. He saw the first of the tripeds loom up over the brow of the hill. And the second, third, fourth. Powerful searchlights beamed down from the metal cabins, crossing and criss-crossing the uneven ground in front of them. He could understand the villagers having credited them with separate entities. It was very difficult to believe that each was no more than an organ of the single Brain.

He thought that the five hunters would miss them in their relentless progress down hill towards the village, and he was right. The nearest beam of light flicked the ground some twenty yards to their left; flicked and passed on. He heard Luther draw a breath of relief. And then, looking up the hill again, he saw another tripod heave across the horizon and knew that it must pass directly over their meager hiding place.

Patience saw it at the same time. She clutched his arm involuntarily, and cried out in sudden, desperate fright. The decision that he reached without hesitation or reflection was partly a protective masculine response, partly a feeling that by making himself a target he would only be exchanging one kind of certain death for another that would at least spare his friends.

He stood up quickly and lunged up out of the hollow, running across the windtorn grass towards the swath of light approaching down the slope. He heard Patience cry something behind him, but the wind carried her voice away at once.

He ran for the light as though it were warmth and shelter. It enveloped him suddenly, and he heard the hooting above him change its key and its intervals. He ran again, still heading away from the hollow.

Almost at once the light lost him. Later he realized that this had probably been deliberate; the cat releasing the mouse to a temporary freedom. But at the time he was only concerned with the fact of the welcome darkness round him again. He knew one part of his purpose had been achieved—he could hear the others casting back up the hill towards him. Now he only had his own life to fight for.

He doubled back towards the crest of the hill. He had seen, before the storm came down, that there was no shelter on this side; and he remembered that as they had toiled up the other there had been a small wood of pines stretching round the side of the hill towards another valley. He didn't really think he could make it, but the thought of simply giving up, of abandoning all action, was intolerable to him.

The hooting behind him settled into a steady rhythm that was almost like the baying of hounds. But giant hardmetal hounds, standing twenty feet

off the ground and equipped with coiled steel arms twenty-five feet in length.

He could feel the vibration of the heavy thudding behind him. His own pulses were thudding and there was an added agonizing tightness in his chest with every searing breath he drew. He wondered how much longer he could go before he dropped.

He didn't realize he was near the wood until he stumbled over a log. He picked himself up and ran a few yards further before he let himself fall alongside a fallen pine. He lay as close to its dark, rotting bark as he could and felt oxygen tearing back into his lungs like a choking, burning gas. He had turned towards the fallen tree so that he could see nothing. But he could not shut his ears to the hooting, close at hand now and terrifyingly loud.

Then the world was dazzling white all round him and he knew he was in the path of one of the tripods' searchlights. He waited in resignation for the tentacle to sweep down and pluck him from his place, but as darkness flowed in again and a huge foot shook the earth a few feet from him he realized that he could not have been noticed.

He lay, still gasping in breath, while the noise of the Hunt passed on into the wood. The respite didn't last long. After about five minutes it was clear that they had circled round and were coming back. Probably they had reached the limits of the wood and guessed then that they had passed him. It was unlikely that he would be missed twice in the same way. But he knew that if he broke back into open country there would be no hope for him at all.

He got up and began edging cautiously towards the approaching line of light from the Meccanoes. It was a small chance, but it was the only one. They were crashing across the wood in a line, some fifteen yards apart. Their searchlights crossed to each other and back again. There were a few seconds in every minute when there was darkness between each of the advancing giants.

It would require knife-edge timing. He sneaked forward from tree to tree, hearing the hooting more and more terrifyingly close. He headed directly between two of the tall, careening searchlights. The jumping line of light was thirty, twenty-five, twenty yards from him. He saw that the Meccanoes had to move slower in the wood, though in part the slowness must also be due to their need to search for him.

Ten yards, five. The searchlights from the Meccanoes to the left and right swept together into a pool of brilliance that turned the needles of the pines into cascades of silver, and then parted, leaving total blackness. Liggard plunged forward, trying to combine speed and quietness; the pine carpet beneath his feet helped.

He turned his head instinctively as the brilliance flared up again, this time behind him. The Meccanoes plodded solidly forward. For the moment he was safe. But they must soon reach the wood's edge, and it would not take them long in the bare open country beyond to guess that their quarry had cheated them again. It was up to him to press forward as quickly as possible while they were on the wrong track.

He made the best speed he could, and before the hooting began growing louder again he had actually

got beyond the zone of freak weather into the ordinary clear twilight of a summer evening. The wood had attenuated several times almost to nothing, but each time it swelled out again beyond. The pines rolled down the valley and up the opposite slope.

For over an hour the Meccanoes were obviously plunging around in a honeycombing search well to the rear. Then, as though picking up some trail, their cry became more purposive behind him. The hunt was on again and with a vengeance.

The trees were thinner here; in some places the marks of the woodsman showed where areas of perhaps a hundred square yards had been cleared down to the stumps. And it was still quite light. He had no hope of doubling back again on the line relentlessly advancing up the slope behind him. He began to walk faster, to run. But all the time the hooting became louder. Although the air was quite cool now, the sweat was pouring torrentially down his body. He was running fast, but without hope. He guessed they could not now be more than a hundred yards away.

He saw the hut as he staggered into the clearing. It was a log cabin, lying just below the hill crest. There was smoke coming from a chimney. Without thinking, without realizing what he was doing he ran towards it, seeing it only as the hope of a refuge. The Meccanoes, hooting, as it seemed, triumphantly, broke through into the clearing as well.

He dropped exhausted to the ground at the side of the cabin, and had enough of his faculties left to see the man burst from the cabin door and race for the further edge of trees. He even saw the metal tentacle uncoil towards the fleeing figure, before unconsciousness finally claimed him.

When he recovered he was not near the cabin at all, but laid before a small group of huts in another clearing. In the heavy dusk he could see the sullen, unfriendly faces watching him. But they were human faces—that was what counted.

He said weakly: "Is the Hunt—over?"

A thickset, elderly man said: "Yeah. It's over."

Liggard closed his eyes again in relief. "Thank God!"

The thickset man said: "We aim always to do things legal. So I better tell you. This village you're in is Gafferty's. I'm Lew Neckers, the headman. I don't know your name, stranger, but you stand indicted for murder."

Liggard laughed weakly. "That's silly," he said. "I haven't killed anyone."

Neckers said stubbornly: "We do things legal. You deny you was in the Hunt?"

Liggard said, more cautiously: "I was being hunted—yes."

Neckers spoke even more slowly. "It may be different in your part of the country but our laws hold that to throw the Hunt onto a man is ordinary murder. It makes no difference if you're hard-pressed and desperate."

"I don't understand," Stanley said.

"You came up the hill," Neckers said. "You had the Hunt after you. You made for Bill Skryski's cabin in the clearing and there was no call to do that unless you wanted to throw the Hunt."

Liggard had a sick feeling. "And—Skryski?"

"Bill Skryski," Neckers said, "had a wife and two

kids in that cabin. Only one thing for him to do. He tried to take the Hunt. They caught him before he'd gone fifty yards. His wife saw everything that happened from the cabin window. Everything. They were quite fast; they only took ten minutes."

His voice almost in a whisper, Liggard said: "I had no idea . . . I didn't guess anything like that could happen." He looked up, at the narrow circle of condemning faces. "They'd been hunting me for two or three hours. I was just about all in. You can see how far gone I was. I never dreamed I was—throwing the Hunt."

Necker said evenly: "I've known that defense to be put forward. I've known it to be accepted. Only trouble is that it needs what we call testimony of character. You got anyone willing and able to vouch for you?"

The truth, he knew, could never be accepted, and if it were it would not help him in this situation. He shook his head reluctantly. "I come from—a good way off. Two or three hundred miles. I don't know anyone."

God knows where Luther and Patience are, he thought. These valleys were like a maze. And they were strangers, too. He looked at the surrounding faces, which were now skeptical as well as ominous. He realized what had probably caused that. They couldn't imagine anyone, in this world, travelling two or three hundred miles from his village. As for the true story . . .

"We do things right," Necker said, with finality. "You'll be put in a room under guard for the night. In the morning, we try you."

Liggard submitted lifelessly as they led him away. The moon was lifting over the further hill.

III

THE TRIAL WAS SOON OVER. He could do no more than repeat what he had said the previous night: that he had been all in, that he hadn't imagined he was throwing the Hunt onto anyone else. Necker, who presided as judge, formally requested him to supply testimony of character; he could only shake his head.

They sentenced him, and then half a dozen of the men took him and led him off up the hill. He judged it to be about ten in the morning; the sun was already beating hotly between the pines.

He said to Necker: "Just how . . . ?"

The trees had thinned out again. They were perhaps five hundred yards above the village; just ahead there was bare rock, gleaming in the sunlight, and the sky blue and stretching into haze beyond it.

"We throw the Hunt back," Necker said. His voice was less sullen now; there was almost a note of friendliness in it. "The Meks use this route." He looked at Liggard obliquely. "Maybe twenty-four hours, maybe a little more. We leave you water."

As they reached the expanse of bare rock that crested the hill, Stanley saw why this would be a route for the Meccanoes. A strip free of trees stretched up obliquely from the next valley, and carried on over the top of the hill and down the other side.

There were two iron rings sunk in a concrete

block between the rocks. They chained him to one of them by a heavy steel bracelet round his left ankle. Then they left him, clomping off down the hill without a backward look. He watched until the trees swallowed them, and then sat down on a flat rock and considered his position.

The trouble was that he could see so well the justice of the villagers' action. To have the attentions of a Hunt transferred to you must be one of the major hazards of life; it was reasonable enough to punish it as murder. After all, while he was lying in a faint beside the cabin, the Meccanoes had been torturing and killing an innocent man in his place. It was all very understandable and carried out, as Necker had boasted, with strict legality. That didn't make it any easier.

The sun rose steadily across the sky, and then as steadily declined. There were no clouds, and only the lightest breeze to sigh among the branches of the pines. He drank thirstily from the big leather water-pouch, and put it back in the shade of the rocks. Once or twice during the day he thought he could hear the distant hooting of a Meccano, and his skin shivered in apprehension, but there was no nearer approach.

He heard the hooting more plainly during the night. Despite the chill of the rock on which he lay, he had dropped off into an uneasy doze, and he was awakened from this to hear the ominous sound stridently close and menacing. He got stiffly to his feet. The valley beneath was bright with moonlight but a circle of brighter light was advancing in a cumbersome dance along the valley floor.

He watched it pass almost directly beneath him and carry on up the valley. The light disappeared and the hooting died away, but he got no more sleep that night. He was glad when dawn broke, though. In view of what Necker had said, it was overwhelmingly likely to be his last.

The morning dragged slowly—even more slowly than the previous day and night had done. Perhaps because he now regarded his time as borrowed—it was more than twenty four hours since the villagers had left him. A hundred times he wondered what it would be like when the steel whip curled down to pluck him from his anchor.

It was a kind of relief when, a little after noon, he saw the Meccano crawling like a great metal crab down the side of the facing hill. The bare stretch down which it was advancing led directly to the similar path on this hill, and so to him. He gave himself about ten minutes. He saw the Meccano pause to thresh idly at something in the undergrowth; and added thirty seconds onto his life.

When he heard voices he thought it could only be his own light-headedness, from lack of sleep, from hunger and fear. But the voices became clearer and unmistakably real. And among them, raised to call to him, its warm brittleness instantly familiar—Patience's. He looked down, and saw them coming towards him: Patience, Luther, a handful of the villagers.

He called, surprised to hear his own voice high-pitched and cracked: "Keep off! There's one coming."

Then he felt Patience kneeling beside him, her

arms round him, her mouth soft and warm on his cheek. Necker was stolidly bending. He turned a key in the leg-iron, and it clicked open.

Necker looked down the hill. "Plenty of time," he said. "But there's no sense in cutting things fine."

They scrambled down over the rocks and into the welcome seclusion of the pines. They were half way down to the village when the hooting vibrated through the air as the Meccano made its way over the hill.

"I'm still not sure of anything," Stanley said.

Necker said: "We'd have been sorry if things had turned out bad, but in part you had yourself to blame. How come you didn't mention Luther Coolen? We would have held you till his next visit. We don't rush things when there's a doubt."

"I had no idea he was known here," Liggard said. He looked at Patience, quiet and self-contained again, walking down beside him. "You told them . . ."

"We gave testimony of character all right," Luther said. "We're glad to see you again, Stanley. I never thought we would."

Liggard grinned. "I'm glad to see you! You'll never know how glad."

That evening the three of them sat out in the glade below the village. The air was cool and with the setting of the sun clouds had begun to roll up over the hills, threatening storm. But a real storm this time, an ordinary natural storm.

"We know you can be trusted now," Luther said.

Liggard said reflectively: "It's a violent and uncertain and treacherous world, but there are some good things in it. Necker and the others, for instance. Considering the situation, they were very fair. I doubt if I would have been treated so fairly in my own time under that kind of provocation."

Patience drew her breath in sharply. "Yes, there are some advantages in living under a reign of terror. There are no wars now. There's no social unrest. But there's the Brain and the Meccanoes."

He caught the implied reproach. "Anything I can do I'll do gladly. I only hope that—if we ever succeed in destroying the Brain—we hang on to something of the neighborliness there is now."

"We must tackle problems as we come to them," Luther said calmly. "The Brain first."

He lit his pipe, and drew on it. Liggard watched him. This was apparently a world without cigarettes. He would have to start pipe-smoking himself.

"Do you remember something I told you about the Brain?" Luther asked. "That it was plutonium-activated?"

Stanley Liggard nodded.

"We know from Kronz's notes the amount of plutonium he used. He had to be super-cautious with it. It was a very tricky business altogether. The amount is not very far below the critical mass. So . . ."

The pieces fitted in, smoothly and beautifully. "So," Stanley continued, "the Brain, by its nature, is permanently on fuse for an atomic explosion. The Brain is a bomb. It only wants a detonator."

"There you have it," Luther said. "The Brain is

aware of it, too. Obviously that's one of the reasons for its deliberate destruction of Man's city civilization. Even before the last world war that civilization was already on the way to becoming a completely industrialized atomic one. The Brain might have used its Meccanoes to destroy a hundred, a thousand atom plants, but as long as man remained urban and industrial it could never rule out the possibility of the small secret plant and the sudden guided missile plunging down on it, beyond the possibility of defense. With a world of small farmers, of lumberjacks and tradesmen and traveling hucksters it could rest in something like security."

Liggard echoed: "Something like security! I should call it a hundred percent security."

"Not quite," Luther said. "After the collapse there were, as you might expect, several attempts by small groups of scientists and technicians to build up small industrial units in secret. They were often in caves, or underground. They had one objective. The production of enough plutonium to detonate the Brain, if it could be once conveyed to it."

"The Brain, of course, hunted them down relentlessly, and successfully. These groups maintained radio communication with each other and one by one, over a period of several years, their transmitters went dead. I was born and reared in one of them. We survived for fifteen years after the Delhi group went."

"Then, when I was a young man, the Brain finally found us, but not before my father and his friends had refined enough plutonium to do what was necessary, and developed a shielding powerful enough to make it genuinely portable. In fact they did it four times over. There were four canisters, each capable of turning the Brain into a mushrooming cloud of radioactive dust."

"When it was known that the Meccanoes had found the factory, two young men—myself and another—were each given two of the canisters and let out through a secret passage under the hill. The others stayed behind to destroy all trace of the passage, and to fight things out with the Meccanoes with the kind of desperation that was appropriate to man's last hope being quenched. I got clear."

"And the other?" Liggard asked.

"He left half an hour after me. I saw them get him."

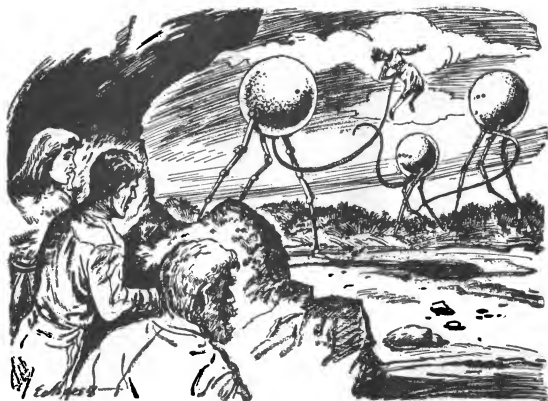
"And you?"

Luther smiled. "For years I chased the Brain, without getting near enough even to make an attempt on it. I followed it from continent to continent, always to find that it had moved on to some new territory. So when I got back to America I decided to wait and let the Brain come to me. It's been a long time, but it's come at last. The Brain is in Philadelphia. So that's where we're heading."

"The canisters," Patience said, "rest on either side of the donkey, one in each pack."

Stanley said thoughtfully: "So the only problem is how to apply them. I don't see how that can be easy. How will you get near it?"

"There's one good chance," Luther said. "I've told you that in some ways the Brain is fascinated by man; by his actions, by that quality of human-



ness which makes him both strong and vulnerable. And gesture especially fascinates it. In part it satisfied the curiosity by having its Meccanoes chase and torture men, but it does it another way was well. The Brain holds court. Its most immediate personal servants—are men."

"But that lays it wide open!" Liggard protested. "Surely, eventually some one will be able, somehow, to throw a spanner in the works. You don't need plutonium."

"It's reported," Patience said evenly, "that one of the Brain's favorite minor amusements is to madden some one of its human slaves into attacking it. It even leaves iron bars lying round in the Main Room for them to pick up. But no iron bar, and certainly no human flesh, will crack the Brain's shell open. We've got the only thing that will do that."

Liggard said slowly: "So the idea is to get one of the Brain's human slaves to take the canister in—to bring the second half of the atomic bomb into contact with the first. Without knowing what he is doing?"

"If we could do it that way," Luther said, "we would. The kind of men and women who serve the Brain, for the sake of the luxuries they get from it and the freedom from ordinary labor, would be no loss, and I wouldn't hesitate to use them. But it's too risky. There are too many possibilities of something going wrong. No, I'm taking it in myself."

He went on speaking, cutting across Liggard's attempt to interrupt. "I don't doubt that you're willing to volunteer for the job. But even ignoring the fact that I am getting to be an old man and that this is a suitable climax to my life, there is another thing. I am more experienced than you in the ways of the Brain. And this is so vital a project that no unnecessary chances must be taken."

Luther looked at his daughter. "Patience knows this."

She nodded reluctantly. "Yes, I know it."

Liggard said, with a feeling of frustration: "Then there's nothing at all I can do?"

Luther smiled at him. "On the contrary, a hundred things. You did one of them two days ago when you took the Hunt from us. Three is so much better than two: there is one more expendable. And there will be a lot to do when the Brain is destroyed. You, with a mind fresh from the world before the Brain, will be invaluable."

"And now," he went on, "we should turn in. We must be off early in the morning."

IV

KNOWING PHILADELPHIA TO BE no more than three hundred and fifty miles away, Stanley had not imagined the journey would present any great difficulties or take any considerable length of time. He soon realized that he had not fully appreciated the difficulties of travelling on foot with a donkey,

and with the need for transacting the full and active business of a huckster on the way. Luther's stocks were nearly exhausted, and their first objective had to be well off their course, for the replenishment of the packs.

One of his main lines was small religious effigies, carved from pearwood. This particular village had a grove of trees, and the carving was their almost universal occupation. Luther paid them in heavy gold coins and the small, delicate figurines and high-reliefs were carefully wrapped in soft cloths and transferred to the packs.

The tempo remained leisurely. They tramped on from village to village, buying and selling and bartering, always with the main objective ahead of them. It was important not to rouse suspicion that they were anything other than a small group of peddlers, going about their ordinary business.

Three or four times a week, on average, they would see one or more of the Meccanoes strutting across the landscape, and take cover until the danger had passed. Liggard became used to that eerie hooting, but it never lost its power to raise his hackles.

Once, from their hiding in a group of bushes, they were forced to watch the conclusion of a Hunt. Seventy or eighty yards from them a hunted woman sank in final exhaustion and the three Meccanoes closed in on her. A tentacle picked her up, tossed her in the air, and she became a ball, flung between the three metal monsters for perhaps ten minutes.

Patience said, her voice dry and hard: "You must watch this. This steels our resolution. There is nothing we can do for her, but we can destroy the spring that sets those pretty little clockwork toys going."

The spasmodic hooting seemed to have a sardonic tone; at times it seemed almost like hysterical laughter. Liggard looked at Patience and saw the soft curve of her cheek set in sharp and bitter lines of concentration. He thought of the possibility of it being Patience up there, thrown between those curling metal arms, and knew that if it were nothing could have stopped him from plunging out to throw his own life away in a futile attack. But it was a human being whose life was being crushed out.

He said urgently to Luther: "In case this plan doesn't work—is there any other way of getting at it?"

"I know only of one other," Luther said. "Patience knows it, too. But this way will succeed. Don't worry about that."

The Meccanoes had tired of their play. One of them took the small figure, held it close against one of the cabin's crystal "eyes," and carefully and slowly, almost tenderly twisted the head from the body.

Liggard drew breath in deeply. "I hope so. I hope so."

Tragedy hit them when they were still eighty miles from their objective. The little donkey sickened, and in three days was dead. It took three weeks of scouring around the neighboring villages before they could find anyone willing to sell them another.

At last they got off again. Autumn was well advanced by now, and the distance they could travel each day was shortened by the narrowing arc of the sun. It was late October when they stood at last on the limits of what had been Philadelphia.

This city had obviously been roughly treated by the Meccanoes at some time in the past, for entire sections had been reduced to patches of uneven rubble and those parts that were standing showed signs of heavy damage. Far off towards the center a pylon gleamed in smooth aluminum.

Luther pointed to it. "The mark of the Brain's residence," he said. "When it comes to a new place the Meccanoes always erect a pylon. We don't know what the purpose is. They leave them behind when the Brain moves on."

"The city's suffered," Stanley said.

Luther nodded. "One of the earliest factory-redundants was built here—somewhere under that rubble."

Stanley nodded. "And now—do we go straight in?"

"No. We look about for a village on the outskirts. There will be traffic between the villagers and the Brain's slaves. There always is."

They found a village easily enough—or the remains of one. There was one house untouched and a couple more that looked as though they were repairable. They found the survivors huddled among the ruins.

Luther asked them: "The Meks?"

One of the women said dully: "The big one itself."

"Does she mean the Brain?" Liggard said to Patience. "That the Brain itself destroyed the village?"

Patience whispered back to him: "It hunts in person sometimes. We don't know why."

Luther spoke to the woman again. "How did it come about?"

"We had the drones up here," she said. "There was some trouble between them and our men. One of them threatened he would set the Brain on us." She gestured about her.

Luther pursued: "It did this—and went back down into the city?"

"The city?" The woman looked up. "No, it's left the city. It hit us during the move. We saw the Meks crowd out westwards, carrying all their portable equipment. You bet we were glad to see them go. Then the big one came out last of all. It circled up this way and hit us. We saw the drone laughing at us. It was carrying him."

After all their efforts, it was a shocking disappointment. There, down in the city, where they had hoped to find their quarry, there was now only the routine Meccano service station. The Brain itself somewhere—anywhere—else. The cup was being dashed from their lips at the very moment of drinking.

Luther said: "Do you have any idea where the Brain was heading?"

"The drone talked about California," the woman said listlessly. "He talked a lot about lying on the beach, in the sun. That's what started the trouble, I guess. Someone told him what he was." She

shrugged her shoulders. "Maybe he was lying."

Luther stood quietly. "Maybe," he said. "Maybe."

The four survivors were about destitute, without even food. The three stayed with them and shared their provisions with them until help began to come in from other villages. In any case they could not summon any enthusiasm for the new trek that would have to be made.

Liggard discussed it with Patience one day, lying out in a field and letting their bodies soak in the brief benediction of Indian summer.

"I've got some clearer idea of the time now," she said. "We missed them by eight hours."

"As little as that!" he said despairingly.

She rolled over onto an elbow and looked at him.

"It's not as little as that," she said. "It would have taken at least a week to make the necessary preparations. We couldn't have just plunged in and laid the fuse."

"I suppose not. God, but it's infuriating, all the same."

"There are compensations. If we'd got here a fortnight earlier—if the plan had worked—Daddy wouldn't be alive now."

She gestured with her hand, and he followed its direction. Below them the ruined village was quiet in the sunlight; at the back of one of the ruined houses Luther was tending the donkey. The smoke from his pipe curled up distinctly through the clear air.

"Oh, I know," Patience went on. "I haven't forgotten the things we've seen. I haven't forgotten that woman. I know it's got to be done, and I'm willing for him to do it. But a reprieve for the Brain is a reprieve for him, and I can't help being glad of it. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes, I understand." He paused, watching the breeze and the sun between them take a wisp of her hair and transmute it into gold. "And now?"

His eyes met hers squarely.

"Tomorrow morning, off again," she said briskly.

"To California?"

She nodded.

"On a guess? On the chance word of a vicious and probably half-mad degenerate drone? What if we're heading in precisely the wrong direction?"

"We may be. But the alternative is waiting until news of the Brain's new place trickles through by the ordinary channels of gossip and information. Remember, we have no wireless, no telegraphy. If it's left the continent we're not likely to catch up with it before it moves again. If it hasn't—California's as likely a place as any."

She paused, considering. "We should make it by the spring. We could do it sooner if we didn't have to wait for the snows to melt in the mountain passes."

"And if the Brain isn't there?"

"Then we've probably lost it. We'll have to wait for it to come back to America—maybe in ten years, maybe in twenty. Meanwhile peddling our way from village to village. Daddy would be too old for the job by then, even if he's alive. And if there's one small, desperate, embattled group of scientists left anywhere in the world, they'll be gone by then. We'll have no allies."

She looked at him. Her eyes were very close to his.

"It's not a bad life," he said. "Even with the Brain and the Meccanoes, it's not a bad life."

He leaned towards her and her warmth came half way to meet him, freely given, a miracle that sharpened all senses, the armed archangel lifting the cup.

The afternoon stretched, blue and golden, about them.

When the new trek was less than a fortnight old, trouble hit them again. Luther, leading the donkey along a difficult path, slipped and fell, and his ankle turned over beneath him. They were able to diagnose it as a sprain, not a fracture, but it was a sufficiently bad one to keep him immobilized for another three weeks. By the time they got going again there was the real feel of winter around them.

Another event took place during the three weeks' enforced idleness. The local priest, making the round of his scattered diocese, stopped at the village and married Stanley and Patience.

The little party struggled on into the colder wind blowing down from the western mountains. Even on good days now they could make no more than twenty five miles, and the increasingly frequent bad weather cut that slow rate of progress down considerably.

When December was half gone, Luther told them the time had come to take shelter for the worst of the winter. There was a village he knew, on the edge of a range of hills, overlooking a plain. They had wintered there before.

Patience nodded, remembering. "Scanlon's," she murmured.

Most of the names of villages were in the possessive, having derived from a new patriarchy. In many cases the family who had given a name to the village still lived in it.

"Ten years ago?" Patience wondered. "I remember their grotto! The blue sky with stars in it, and the models of—what were they?"

Luther looked at her affectionately, remembering. Stanley Liggard thought, the years before he had come; their earlier wanderings. Those years, too, had been full and eventful ones.

"Camels," he told her.

She echoed, delighted: "Camels!"

They were remembered in the village and made welcome, and Liggard along with them. Previously, apart from the incidents of the donkey's death and Luther's sprained leg, their life had been nomadic, moving daily from village to village, putting down no roots. But this was the time when the huckster took his rest, sustained for a couple of months on the fat of the summer, a welcomed and prepared-for idleness.

The village was a fairly large one; more than thirty buildings clustered together just under the crest of the last hill before the plain. Just under, because it was not wise to build on a hilltop and invite more attention from the Meccanoes than normal chances gave. They got two rooms at the inn, and in the evenings in the bar there was the warmth of log fires, and ale, and good companionship.

The grotto that Patience had remembered was

being built again, in the church beside the inn. Most of the village lent a hand in some way with its construction, and Stanley found a lost boyhood prowess returning as he whittled small pieces of wood into appropriate, satisfying shapes. A week before Christmas it was completed.

The small niche in the stone of the church had become a window into a new landscape. The sky the brilliant blue of Syrian evening, with one great star; the shepherds with their flocks on the hill; the three travellers; the village huddled upon itself as though guarding a treasure; and in the foreground the cave with its kneeling animals, and among the straw the parents kneeling to their Child. The camels were there, too.

Patience pointed them out to Stanley. "I was only thirteen," she said. "It was magic then."

"And now?"

"It's still magic. But more as well. The Brain hasn't got this. It isn't in the same universe even. That's a wonderful thing to remember."

They had cause to remember it.

During the week there was carol singing and a quickening tempo of preparation for the joyous feast of Christmas. On the Eve itself there was the midnight service which everyone attended. The little church was packed with villagers and people who had walked or ridden or driven in from outlying farms. The warm glow of lantern and candle gleamed on the bowed heads and flickered on the small landscape of the crib.

Above the music they heard the other noise echoing through the wintry air. They waited until the hooting was close upon them before they scattered. Stanley hurried Patience out through a side door, and into the narrow, winding street. Snow which had fallen earlier in the week had lain; and the night, brilliant anyway with a clarity of moon and stars, was made more brilliant by it.

Across this whiteness the little seemingly incandescent circles of light of the Meccanoes' searchbeams marched towards them up the hillside. The Meccanoes themselves loomed blackly and menacing against the snow. Liggard looked for Luther, but he had gone another way. He pulled Patience into the stream of people running from the village into any kind of refuge in the wilderness beyond.

They huddled in a snowdrift thirty yards from the village's edge and watched what took place. It was very cold; the stars themselves looked like suspensions of frozen snow.

There were three Meccanoes. They stalked upwards across the snow towards the village; fifty yards from its edge their hooting ceased abruptly, and they covered the remainder of the distance in a silence more terrifying than the noise had been. Their metal feet were silent, too, on the soft bed of the snow.

But noise returned; first the splintering of brick against metal as the foremost Meccano ploughed its way through the village's center—and then the screaming of victims trapped or crushed. Moonlight spun soft webs of light from the harsh metal of the advancing tripods as they moved in and stood, finally, grouped about their objective. The church.

Then the tentacular arms came down, flailing, tearing at and smashing the vaulted roof. The noise

of crumbling stone again. The screaming which had momentarily dropped started up once more. It rang shrilly through the frosty air.

The destruction of the church took about ten minutes. When it was over the Meccanoes moved on, treading their way out through the village and off over the ridge of the hill and out of sight. Stanley heard Patience beside him sigh—he could not tell whether in relief or anger.

"I suppose we might as well get back," he said.

Figures picked themselves up out of the snow, and began to move back into the village. They moved for the most part in silence—when someone did speak it was in a whisper that drifted sibilantly over the frozen snow. In the village groups detached themselves from the general stream to attend to the hurt and trapped. Looking for Luther, Patience and Stanley found themselves standing by the ruin of the church.

Most of the front and the whole of the roof had been pulled in. The fallen masonry lay in grotesque, jutting heaps inside the shell of the church, looking, in the subtle half-tones of moonlight, like some antique ruin.

As they stood staring at it, Luther came up. "I lost you," he said. "I'm glad you're all right."

"I don't think there are many casualties," Patience said. "And any there are might be called accidental. I didn't see them pick anyone up."

"No," Luther said. He nodded towards the church. "They had something else in view."

Liggard burst out: "I don't get it. I don't get it at all. What does the Brain think it gains by this? In a way it's—an admission of its own limitations."

"Yes," Luther agreed softly. "But even in men, remember, that is where the reaction is most violent: where a limitation has to be admitted. Shall we go in?"

They went in through the open side of the church. Others had already begun to do the same. They sat awkwardly on blocks of stone. Someone started to sing a carol, and the rest joined in. Stanley felt Patience grip his arm.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

In the niche in the wall the nativity scene remained untouched by the violence that had raged above it. There was even a candle still burning in front of it.

V

WINTER RELAXED ITS GRIP on the frozen countryside slowly. At the earliest opportunity that the weather allowed they set off again. Almost straight away they had heartening news. An itinerant cobbler, travelling in the opposite direction, confirmed that the Brain had taken up his new residence in California, among the ruins that had once been called Los Angeles. There was every prospect that they would find it still there when they reached the city. They had started the last lap.

It was in reaction from this wave of cheerfulness that Liggard considered their chances of achieving anything even if they reached the Brain's home ground. What chance had two men—one of them past sixty—and a girl against the metal-clad power and cunning that had destroyed so easily the

finest armies of a world at the peak of its technological prowess? Walking beside the donkey he tapped, as he had done before, the small bulge at the bottom of the pack that represented their forlorn and remote hope. It seemed quite hopeless. And yet . . .

He was aware of an irrational feeling of confidence. Miracles commonly turned at the touch of one hand—and Luther's was a good hand.

They zigzagged their way up through the mountain villages and through the passes until the last pass was reached and they stood looking down the fall of ground to the great plain beyond. From there on the going was easier. They wandered through the prosperous villages of California into the lengthening days of spring.

The nearest village to the ruins of Los Angeles was called Mickman's. It lay on the coast to the north of the city—a cluster of perhaps twenty-five ramshackle houses inhabited by fishermen. It was very crowded: there was no question of getting any accommodation. Fortunately the weather had become so clear and mild that there was little hardship in sleeping out in the open, on the curving, fine-sanded beach. By day they bought and sold and bartered in the village.

It was easy enough to recognize the Brain's slaves: the drones. They shared a characteristic of an unhealthy flabbiness; even the thinner ones had layers of fat which marked them out from the lean-featured workers. That was the physical distinction. They wore also gaily-colored clothes which hung clingingly on them in defiance of all utility.

But most important of all was the aspect of temperament. They were marked by their flamboyant theatrical posturings, their condescending flattery, their sudden rages and overwhelming, emotional griefs.

The problem, as Luther had explained it, was for him to get into the Brain's entourage as a replacement or substitute for one of the drones. It had seemed easy enough when viewed abstractly. Quite frequently, it was known, a drone would find the grotesque futility of his life too overpowering, and change places with some outsider eager for the superficial softness of life with the Brain. And there were also, of course, the occasional casualties among the drones—either by accident or through one of the Brain's whims of cruelty.

Before seeing them at close quarters, Liggard had imagined that a quality of courage must exist along with the servility of these slaves: since they took the risk of living day by day under the Brain's continual surveillance and were always at the mercy of his fury.

But he realized now that no question of courage was involved. These people had plumbed the worst depths of cowardice; to the stage where they could find psychological security only under the shadow of the oppressor.

And just at present, in the soft warmth of spring sunshine, the drones did not seem at all anxious to change their leisurely existence for any more strenuous one. During their long periods of non-duty they drifted, men and women alike, about the villages on the perimeter of the city's ruins, arguing, drinking, fighting, making love, all the

time despising and hating the ordinary human beings whose lives they were disrupting.

After a number of tentative approaches, Luther at last put the question directly to one of the drones, a squat, middle-aged male, dressed in gold and purple, as they sat drinking wine outside the small inn one hot afternoon.

The drone seemed only too willing to talk.

"I'm getting on," Luther said. "Peddling . . . it's a hard life. I find it too much for me." He looked at the drone directly. "I could pay for an entry to an easier life."

The drone laughed. "Pay! What's money to me? I know where I'm well off. I don't want the capital to set up in business on my own."

"But one of the others?" Luther persisted.

The drone let his gaze run easily and contemptuously over Luther's face and stubbly white beard.

"There's just one other thing, grandad. The Brain doesn't take attendants over fifty. It's not interested. I've only got five years to go myself before I get my ticket. I'll come and join you outside then. But you won't get in to the Brain—don't fool yourself."

He drifted away from them in search of some more amusing means of passing the time. They found another unattached drone, and Luther repeated the approach, with the same result. The first had not been lying.

Luther took it badly. He said, "To have been deceiving myself for so long . . ."

Patience poured dark red wine from the flask into their glasses. The sun grilled in a blue heaven. "So it's my turn," she said. "I have next chance." She looked at Stanley with affectionate determination. "No arguments."

Liggard felt the wine, dry against his palate, cool against his throat.

"No," he said. "No arguments. No emotions either. We must look at everything in the light of cold reason." He caught her hand that lay on the table, and imprisoned it between his own. "Well?"

"Well . . ." she began dubiously.

Liggard looked at Luther. Luther nodded.

"Now," Liggard said. "No arguments about defending the sacred mothers of the race—or the fathers for that matter. And no claims as to who was here first. Not even about seniority, although with my birth-date I can outrank Luther by three quarters of a century. We'll stick to reason—and the fact that the only really important thing is to find the best way of giving the Brain his plutonium twin. That being so"—he looked at Patience—"I challenge you. I'll challenge you on strength, endurance, reflexes and ability in straight bluffing." He grinned. "We can test that one by half a dozen hands of poker."

"That convinces me," Luther said. "I guess it will have to do for you, too, Patience."

Her face whitened. "This isn't a joke," she said. "This is certain death for . . ."

"Yes," Luther said gently. "For your husband."

Patience turned to her father quickly. "Daddy, I didn't mean that. I didn't . . ."

"It's very hard," Luther said. "It's very hard for me to be an old man, too old to be any use, when I had hoped to finish things off in a blaze of mush-

rooming glory. And it's very hard to sit back and let either of you take that death in my place. But this is the one great chance of smashing the Brain. We've got to take it. You go, Stanley, with our blessing. With both our blessings."

He looked at Patience.

"Yes," she said at last. "With both our blessings."

IT STILL TOOK TIME and a considerable amount of trouble to find the right opening for Liggard, but it was accomplished at last. One of the younger drones, about Stanley's own age, revolted suddenly against the futility of the life he was leading and offered the exchange without any financial consideration. Stanley arranged things himself, keeping Luther and Patience in the background.

The drone's name was Izaak Laperto, a tall, swarthy-skinned, dark-haired man. He looked at Liggard curiously.

"Yeah, it's an easy life, all right," he said. "No trouble about working. Food's available on tap, as and when and what you like. If supplies run short the Brain sends out a few Meks to round up another supply."

"And in return?"

"In return all you have to do is use your loaf. Work—there's no real work. Dust the Control Room, tighten up a screw here and there, read a dial. No real work because the Brain doesn't trust people any place they might do any damage. No, all the Brain wants is that you should act up. Jump around, throw an attitude, fight, get emotional—anything that makes you look like a real live doll that says mamma. If you want my advice, don't overdo it and don't underdo it. If you're just normally abnormal you'll get by without trouble."

"How does the Brain communicate with you?"

"The Brain talks English. It uses some kind of automatic speech arrangement. It sounds a bit tinny but you'll understand it all right. All the Meks are equipped with it for that matter, but they use that damned hooting instead. Don't ask me why. Don't ask me why the Brain does anything. I don't know and I don't want to. From now on I'm dodging the whole damned lot of them."

"Good luck to you," Liggard said.

"And to you, brother. You're going to need it just as much. From the Brain so much as from the dimwits and schizos you'll be working with. Anyway, here's the rig. The Brain will spot you as being new. He always does. You don't have to worry though. There'll be an interview, but you've got nothing to worry about."

It was difficult parting with Patience and Luther, even though it was not in the nature of a final parting. Although working, and to a certain extent living at the Brain's headquarters, he knew that he could get back to the village often enough in his spare time, with the proviso, of course, that everything he did must be beyond suspicion.

"Don't strain anything, Stanley," Luther said anxiously. "There's no need to rush things. Now that we know we can get in it would be stupid to take unnecessary risks."

The strain was telling on Patience. Her eyes were deeper sunk, her cheeks more taut with anxiety and fear.

"Give us as long as you can," she said. "As long of you as you can."

He kissed her lingeringly. "You don't have to tell me."

He picked up a party of drones going back to headquarters. They had a gasoline-driven boat, carrying about twenty-five, which shuffled back and forth along the coast at their convenience. He saw the shore drop back, and Luther and Patience with it, and then the village itself become a blur of brown against the sand. The ocean was very calm and blue.

One of the other drones, a girl of about twenty, blonde and attractive but like the rest a little flabby, spoke to him: "You the new guy?"

Liggard nodded.

The girl studied him critically. "You'll have to show more zip if you want to stay in with the Brain. It's the vitality that counts."

She illustrated her meaning by contorting her features into an expression that was very emotional—though it would have been difficult to put a precise label on the emotion—and contorting her shoulders voluptuously.

"I don't mind," she said, "giving you a little private tuition."

"Thanks," Liggard said. "I'll bear that in mind."

Already he felt the strain of being surrounded by these unnatural aberrations from the decent human norm, and was depressed by the thought that he would have to copy them and to accept their standards. The sea was some help, stretching illimitably out to the far horizon. Against that vast purity the antics of these creatures could be regarded with tolerance. And the thought of the vast distances of the ocean brought forcibly to his mind once more the unbelievable good fortune of having his quarry so nearly within his grasp.

The Brain might have skipped to India, to Australia. But it had gone no further than Los Angeles, and in less than half an hour he would be finally in its presence.

They disembarked at an old, crumbling quay and sauntered into town in an undisciplined, scattered group. It was strange to be walking casually through these empty and ruined streets. The city had not suffered greatly from the Meccanoes' depredations and only twice did they have to leave street level to scramble over rubble.

Ten minutes brought them to the Brain's citadel. They turned a corner and it was in front of them—the aluminium pylon reaching gracelessly into the bare sky, catching the sunlight and flicking it out again, and round it a dozen or more squat, dome-shaped metal buildings, one, directly under the pylon, a good deal larger than the others, and architecturally more ornate.

The domes were quite light inside, being illuminated from curving plate glass or transparent plastic windows set high up in the sides. Liggard was shown round them, except for the seven or eight which were workshops and store rooms used by Meccanoes. He glanced into one of these as they went past the entrance, and saw inside it two of the Meccanoes swinging their great tentacles in some form of machining operation, which was accompanied by the bright glare of a welding arc.

There were ten domes devoted to the needs of the drones—they ranged from capacious living quarters to a large luxurious swimming pool and restaurant. Liggard wondered what could be the reason for the drones going out to the surrounding ramshackle villages when here such ease and splendor surrounded them. But another glance at the physical presences of his new companions was sufficient explanation in itself.

They wanted desperately to get away from themselves and from this debauched way of life. In the villages they could see real human beings living genuine, useful lives. They could even pretend to despise them.

He went into the Brain's dome on Izaak Laper-to's shift. Izaak had explained what he would probably have to do, and one of the other drones confirmed it for him. The brain ingested certain chemicals as part of its regime. The system had to be checked on the inflow dials, marked in red for fool-proof operation.

"Nothing's likely to go wrong," Izaak had said, "but don't go to sleep. If the wrong mixture does go in, the Brain will know as soon as you do, and your life won't be worth two cents. And the Brain's quite capable of having its own supply doctored just for the hell of it. Watch those dials."

The other domes were perhaps eighty feet across and forty high. This one was half that size again. Round the sides and stretching in towards the center were the great banks of instruments and switches by which the Brain was kept in being. But for thirty feet about the center there was nothing, and in the center was the Brain, with three of the Meccanoes, prone and inactive, like watchdogs about it.

Luther, from the various hearsay reports he had gathered and from the notes in Kronz's work that had been kept in the last redoubt of man's struggle against his usurper, had described it pretty well. The Brain was quite small. It rested on a low pedestal, and its highest point was no higher than a tall man's shoulder. It was perhaps three feet across; round and studded with audient and visual devices. The top bulged gently into transparent crystal, and behind the crystal could be seen the radioactive node that was the mainspring of the Brain's existence. When it was necessary for one of the drones to approach the Brain itself, shielded clothing was provided.

Liggard divided his attention between the Brain and the dial he had to watch. Patience, on one of his visits back to the village, would sew a suitable pocket on the inside of the scarlet and blue robe he wore. Then, he would have the small cylinder there. Whenever the occasion arose for him to go right up to the Brain it would be an easy matter to unclasp the screening holder, to walk easily forwards, to reach the Brain and press against that crystal bulge, and . . . And nothingness. Well-earned nothingness in a cloud of smoke.

VI

THE BRAIN CALLED HIM on his second shift. The cold, clanking voice echoed through the great dome with chill resonance.

"Worker on Board X Fifty-seven D advance for audience. Worker on Board X Fifty-seven D advance for audience."

He had seen others do it already. On the first shift, in particular, he had seen a woman called forward and plagued by some jibes—in audible from where he stood—to the point of throwing herself forward in a fury against that apparently fragile crystal. One tentacle of one of the recumbent Meccanoes stretched lazily up to pluck her in mid-air. She had been fortunate. After five minutes' shaking, as a dog shakes a rat, she had been released and permitted to stumble back to her duties.

Now Stanley advanced himself. This was the testing occasion; on this, the first time in which he would come under the Brain's direct attention, depended the entire success of his mission. Gesture, he told himself desperately, the Brain wants emotion and gesture. He remembered, from his schooldays, a device that had always worked with bullies, providing the bullies were big enough and self-confident enough. He came forward to the Brain, slouching, his face drawn into a malignant scowl of hate that needed little feigning.

He had donned the protective cloak that hung by his Board, but when he was still ten paces away a voice, lower-toned, emanating directly from one of the projections on the Brain itself, commanded him: "Halt."

He stopped. Under the transparent shielding cloak he fixed his hands defiantly on his hips and stared up with a calmness that was almost insolent.

The Brain said: "Your name?"

"Stanley Liggard."

"It is registered. You are new. Where is Izaak Laper-to?"

The Brain, Liggard realized, had a first-class filing system memory. Of course he had known it must have, but it was frightening being faced by the actuality. His own mind racing, he looked up sullenly towards the Brain.

"I bought him out. He was fed up with the job anyway."

"It is registered. You yourself are anxious to serve the Brain. Why?"

"I've worked around a bit. Stonemason, general laborer"—he paused—"huckster . . . Hard graft all the time. I want it easy. This will do me."

"If," the Brain said, "the Brain accepts you."

He wondered whether the Brain's habit of referring to itself in the third person signified anything. Aloud he said: "You always got to take that chance." He glanced, summoning all the insolence of the animated against the unanimated, at the metal box and its bulging crystal. "Well? Does the Brain accept me?"

There was a slight pause.

"All the Brain's decisions are provisional, the Brain said. "Provisionally you are accepted. Stanley Liggard: return to your Board."

He walked back across the polished, empty floor, hung up his shielding cloak, and returned his attention to the barely flickering fingers on the dial. He saw that some of the workers and neighboring Boards were watching him covertly; with envy and with respect. Ten minutes later the Brain called one of them forward and obliged him

to squirm round the base of the pedestal on his belly.

His demeanor, and the fact that he had got away with it in his first interview with the Brain, seemed to have made quite a powerful impression on the other drones. In the subsequent leisure period they made that quite clear to him; and the fact that with them he maintained the attitude of off-handed surliness he had shown to the Brain only increased their uneasy admiration and respect.

In particular, several of the women made it clear that any attentions he cared to pay them would be welcome. He rebuffed them cynically. The psychology of the situation was working out better than he could have hoped; an attitude that was no more than an accentuation of his natural feelings would be easy enough to maintain.

Deliberately he did not go back to the village during the first few rest periods but concentrated on getting to know the layout of his new surroundings with the utmost possible accuracy. The Brain did not call him out again during duty periods. Everything was going well.

On the fourth rest period—early afternoon of a day that had clouded over with towering cumulus clouds—he joined a party going down to the quay. Just over an hour later he had found Luther and Patience in the place that had been arranged: a small upper room in the inn.

Patience, when she had finally released him, asked: "What was it like? Have you seen the Brain?"

He nodded. Luther pressed him. There was a note of what seemed like wistfulness in his voice. "You've really seen it?" he inquired.

Stanley told them of his interview and of the attitude he had adopted. Sitting here in this little room with alternate sunlight and shade drifting across the busy village street outside, the Los Angeles domes and the Brain itself seemed very far away.

"Things couldn't be going better," Luther said.

Patience looked at him bitterly. "They couldn't, could they? How long . . . ?" she asked.

Stanley Liggard had been calculating that himself.

"I've got to have time to develop things naturally. It would be stupid to ruin things by taking risks now. At least a month, I think. During that time I'll come back here every fourth or fifth rest period. Oftener would be unwise." He hesitated. "Of course, anything might happen in that time; at any moment the Brain might decide to dispose of me, one way or another. It's a risk either way."

He looked at Luther, questioningly.

"Caution—you must go warily," Luther said. "It would be far worse to rouse the Brain's suspicions in any way. If anything, err on the side of delay."

He did not look at Patience. Liggard did. He saw her face taut and almost haggard under the agony of this discussion in which, academically, the date of his certain death was being determined.

"So—for now anyway—let's not worry," Stanley said. "Let's forget about it all."

A counsel, he realized as he said it, of quite impossible perfection.

Liggard had thought the time would speed past on lightning wings, but instead the days—the rest periods and the short duty periods—dragged out with paralyzing deliberation. And the uneasy fear that he had felt at the beginning that something, most probably the Brain, would intervene and bring the carefully constructed plan crashing prematurely about his ears developed into a nagging obsession that rarely left him.

He wasn't blind to the fact that not a little of this was due to his own suppressed wish for something to prevent the denouement taking place. It was difficult to be continually enthusiastic about death, when he had so much to live for. And yet the very things which made life precious were the driving forces in his determination to smash the Brain in the one way that was possible. Altogether life was increasingly complicated and hag-ridden by various apprehensions.

On duty the Brain had left him alone since that first interview, now more than a fortnight in the past. It was on a night duty, in the soft gleam of concealed lighting in the great dome, that the Brain called him out again.

"Stanley Liggard on Board X Thirty-seven D advance for audience. Stanley Liggard on Board X Thirty-seven D advance for audience."

For a moment the full sway of fear and counter-fear crippled him. It seemed impossible to move in any direction. But, summoning his will, he did move, and found himself walking, stiff-legged, out into the polished emptiness, towards the Brain and his attendant, motionless Meccanoes.

The more personal, nearer voice, halted him, but not until he was nearer, much nearer, than he had been on the other occasion. He was no more than three yards from the seat of power. He halted, stifling a wish, foolish and irrational but well-nigh overwhelming, to rush forward and batter the fragile bubble before him.

It was a kind of relief when the Brain spoke again: "Is service with the Brain to your liking, Stanley Liggard?"

He said, easily enough: "It'll do. Better than work, anyway. I got no complaints."

"The Brain expects entire service from its followers. In all things the Brain must be obeyed. A good servant seeks for ways in which it can serve the master."

Let it ride, he thought. He said nothing.

The impersonal, slightly mechanical voice waited for a moment before continuing: "The Brain retains only its good followers. It has no use for the inadequate. Do you realize that, Stanley Liggard?"

"Yeah," Liggard said. "I get it."

"Good," the Brain said. "Now—dance!"

Liggard stared ahead stubbornly.

"Dance!" the Brain repeated. "The Brain commands its servant to dance."

Terrifyingly, like a cancerous weakness, there was the impulse to submit—anything rather than antagonize this cold, omnipotent voice. It almost moved his limbs into motion. But behind it his mind raced in assessment of the situation. If he cracked now, anything might follow. At school the bullies had occasionally tested the show of strength

in their smaller companions; and if it cracked, treated that unfortunate one worse than their ordinary victims. Whereas, if he could get away with it . . . the way would be open for the real thing.

"I'm not a dancer," he said.

"Nevertheless," the voice continued, "the Brain commands you."

He stood his ground even when in front of him the nearest Meccano reared into sudden, horrifying life; and one of its tentacles curled through the air towards him. In this situation there was no hope in running. The prehensile metal gripped him around the waist and lifted him high into the air.

He neither struggled nor kicked. The tentacle began shaking him, jerking him against his volition into a kind of aerial jig.

Shaken and battered, he heard the Brain's voice: "When the Brain commands its servant to dance, the servant dances."

Suddenly the motion was over. From about ten feet above the ground the tentacle unclashed and dropped him. He hit the ground heavily and lay there, sprawling and out of breath.

"Get up," the Brain said.

Unsteadily he got to his feet.

"Return to your Board. And remember."

When Liggard came off duty in the morning he went straight to the village. Luther and Patience were not expecting him, and he had to find them. He found them out on the beach, in the primitive tents they had rigged up for sleeping quarters.

Luther looked at him keenly. "Anything wrong?" he asked.

He told them of his second interview with the Brain. When he had finished, he said: "We can't waste any more time. The next occasion the Brain calls me out I must be armed. I'm pretty sure it will try to taunt me into some kind of action. It isn't going to let me get away with dumb insolence again, but it won't be expecting any sudden rush. I shall have time enough to reach it: it will want me to reach it. The setup couldn't be more promising. And, on the other hand, if I'm not absolutely ready for it, the whole thing could be ruined."

Patience had been listening to what he said. She said herself, her voice twisted with pain: "I dreamed last night. I dreamed we'd had to give the whole thing up—that we'd gone away, up north somewhere. The air was fresh and there were cold, blue lakes." She looked at Stanley. "I didn't want to wake up."

Stanley said, very gently: "And were there any children? And were they growing into a manhood in which they would have to scurry like rabbits into holes in the ground at the sight of a Meccano coming over the horizon? No, that's one thing we're sure of. Life on those terms isn't worth living."

Patience nodded and looked away. "I can think of other terms like that," she said.

They spent the day together. Towards evening Luther unpacked the donkey's right hand pack and brought out the canister. He explained what must be done again to Stanley.

"The shielding alloy was my father's work; it would have been enough to get him a Nobel Prize in pre-Brain days. The canister is designed for the

job. At the moment you are called forward, release this catch and a spring device pushes the shield off. There's no complicated unscrewing or anything. And from that moment it's loaded. Bring it up against the Brain's crystal, and . . ."

"Yes," Stanley said. "I know the rest."

He patted the donkey's muzzle, and this small action of bidding farewell to the animal heightened for a moment his awareness of all the other things he was saying goodbye to. And, paradoxically, made it more and more certainly worthwhile. But it was very hard to kiss Patience, and harder still to have to unwind her clinging arms.

"You're out of range here, of course," he said. "But don't turn to look at any sudden flashes in the sky."

He went then, and was glad to go.

VII

BACK ON DUTY IN THE DOME Liggard was conscious all the time of the small heavy canister hanging inside the loose, gaudy robe he wore. It was a consciousness that made it difficult to keep his attention properly on the dials on his Board. At the sound of every announcement from the Brain he could not help starting.

But no summons came for him. One of the more theatrical women was brought out and reduced to flooding tears; a man was shaken into storming rage and another dragged down to the extremities of cringing abasement, but there was no call for Stanley Liggard. He came off duty in a state of near nervous exhaustion.

There was no point in going back to the village. He could only lounge around the luxurious haunts of the drones and count the slow minutes of the rest period. One of the older men got into conversation with him.

"Bit of an exhibition this morning, wasn't it? I reckon he's building up for a Hunt."

"But surely there are Hunts going on all the time?"

"A *personal* Hunt. You've not been here for one of those? The Brain has himself hoisted on to a giant Mek he keeps in store—it stands a good forty feet high—and goes off on a Hunt of his own. Gets more of a kick out of it that way, I guess. When he lands anyone, he lifts the poor devil up and does 'em slowly—right under his nose, as you might say. Funny creature, the Brain."

That kind of casual acceptance of the Brain's tyranny seemed to Liggard far more shocking than the tyranny itself. Another hundred years and the Brain would be a god, an eccentric but a worshipped deity.

It was inevitable, Man being what he was.

He said: "It never goes for—us, then?"

"No. It even warns us off the part it's going to hunt through. The Brain treats us all right, if we act careful."

Duty time came round again at last—a short morning stint. Stanley stood in front of his Board for two hours before anything happened. He was paying only the most cursory attention to the dials in front of him. Suddenly he saw that the finger on the main dial had gone shooting beyond the

scarlet safety mark and was pressing twenty or thirty degrees ahead.

At the same instant the loudspeaker roared: "Board X Thirty-seven D—Supervisor take over. Board X Thirty-seven D—Supervisor take over. Stanley Liggard advance for audience. Stanley Liggard advance for audience."

The Supervisor came up and began adjusting the controls. Stanley slipped on the screening cloak and began to walk forward. Under the cloak his hand was on the canister, his finger caressing the release catch. He walked straight towards the Brain.

Two or three yards from the pedestal, the near speaker came on. "Halt!" it commanded.

Liggard stood, restraining his limbs from trembling.

The Brain said: "You are an inefficient as well as a disobedient worker. Have you any comment on this?"

"I have," he said stiffly. "You fixed me. You fixed those dials."

He was watching for the faintest sign of movement on the part of the recumbent Meccano. He knew, from his previous experience, that he could cross the intervening distance before the Meccano could reach him, provided he acted at the first instant of its stirring. The knowledge that now, at last, the Brain was within his reach lifted his spirits to a crest of triumph, overriding any thought of his own fate. Under the cloak he released the catch, and felt the two halves of the canister click apart. He tensed his muscles for the plunge.

"Liggard is not a common name," the Brain said. "From which part of this continent do you come?"

The remark threw him slightly off balance. And with that minor disequilibrium a part of his determination ebbed away. He had the Brain at his mercy, and one minute was as good as the next for the final blow. He could play the great fish on his line at his leisure. He thought he heard a faint, metallic sliding sound somewhere, but noises of that kind were commonplace in the domes.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you the truth about my origin," he said.

"The Brain has heard many strange things," the Brain said. "You are privileged to say what you wish."

Something was wrong. He knew that now. His ears caught a faint whirring noise in the air. There was no time left for delay. He gathered his strength and leapt forward . . . and as he leapt was caught in mid-air by a metal band that tightened round his waist, crushing the breath from his body and pulling him up and away from the Brain.

Twenty feet up he was held while another tentacle probed beneath his cloak and pulled out the plutonium capsule. He could see now what had happened. A section of the roof had slid back and the giant Meccano which was the Brain's own vehicle had come through the gap to grasp him just as he was making his attack.

Having obtained the capsule, the Meccano tossed him to the floor. He fell very heavily.

"In case the statistic interests you," the Brain said. "You failed by one fifth of a second."

Stanley Liggard said nothing. He lay, winded,

conscious only of the black fog of failure about him. Death was still certain—slow death probably—but a personal tragedy leaving the world still in the grip of this steel servitude. There was no hope of anything.

"It is repeated: you are privileged to say what you wish," the Brain said.

Liggard said dully: "How did you know?"

"You have been under suspicion. The man who was seen twice fifteen hundred miles from here"—the Meccano that had attacked him the first morning and the others that had hunted him would, of course, have recorded impressions in the Brain's composite memory—"appears now as a candidate for service. That is cause for suspicion."

"For your audiences all safeguards were automatically put into operation. And then, during conversation, the incorporated Geiger counters"—Liggard cursed his own shortsightedness—"suddenly began recording heavily. It was then necessary to stall you until precautions of the right kind could be taken. This has been done."

"And now?"

"Very soon you will die. The precise method needs consideration, since it is very long since a crime of this magnitude has been attempted against the Brain. It will have to be extremely public, as a warning to the others."

"You can do what you like to me. Someone will get you some day. I've shown the Brain to be vulnerable."

"The Brain has always been vulnerable in one way, and one way only. It is a matter to which the Brain has given much consideration. And it is now solved. The shielding alloy which enclosed the plutonium capsule before you released the catch is the answer. The Brain is now invulnerable."

There was truth in it. It would be easy enough for the Brain's Meccanos to investigate and duplicate the alloy. Liggard said wretchedly: "So the Brain has to depend on Man for its safety, as it did for its creation."

"The Brain acknowledges that it is capable of creative thought only in a very limited field. This, too, has been given consideration. The Brain has now decided that it will make arrangements for men to carry out this work—*now that the Brain is invulnerable.*"

The emphasis came from an increase in volume. Liggard considered the implications of it. Men to be allowed laboratory tools again—under the Brain's supervision, for the Brain's profit. His anger rose like a lifting wave.

"You filth! You evil metal filth!"

"The Brain," said the Brain, "is beyond good and evil."

Liggard recovered himself. "No. You're wrong there, you know. In the realm of consciousness, nothing is beyond good and evil. Only the unconscious is neutral. You are evil, all right."

The Brain's hesitation was fractional. "You use terms that are outside the Brain's scope of reference."

"They are not outside the scope of reference of a creature that can torture other sentient beings simply for the sake of torture."

"Torture? The Brain's definition would be dis-

passionate curiosity. The Brain is without gesture and without emotion. A curiosity in the display of these things in creatures that possess them is only natural."

"A curiosity," Liggard said, "that is never satisfied. Every day, all over the world, the instruments, the limbs of the Brain, destroy and torture. But still, the Brain is interested in more. Is there going to be a personal Hunt again soon?"

There was another, longer pause. Then the Brain said: "Your accents of speech have been analyzed. They are unusual. The basic intonations have not been previously encountered."

"I told you you wouldn't believe my story if I told you," Liggard said.

"You are instructed to speak."

It didn't matter. Nothing mattered now; not even whether his own death was hastened or delayed. He told the Brain casually of his hibernation and his awakening. The last part he invented. In this world of the future he had met a dying old man, who had passed on to him the capsule of plutonium. That, at least, was the absolute truth. He doubted if this or anything else could help Luther and Patience now, but at least it would not, like the true account, expose them to the possibility of the Brain's persecution and vindictiveness.

"Your story is improbable," the Brain said, "but best fits certain facts. The means for this hibernation, even if they could be reproduced, are of no interest or advantage to the Brain. It is possible that you may be able to tell the Brain things of interest in connection with your life in the world before the Brain. You are relieved until after later examination. I would like to know how a man feels cut off for years from his fellows."

Liggard said: "Is there any reason why I should tell you anything when I know you will eventually torture me to death anyway?"

"The reasons," the Brain said, "will be applied by the Meccanoes. You will only be too glad to satisfy my curiosity."

Suddenly the mechanical voice roared out on to the main speakers.

"Supervisor Lee Colroy. Boardmen Henry Natuski, Bray Stephens, Arturo Pelligrew, Michael Flaherty. Advance for audience."

They came forward and stood around Liggard. They were, he noticed, tougher than the run of drones in appearance.

"Boardman Stanley Liggard to be guarded for further audiences," the Brain said. "The penalties for failure to keep adequate guard will be as usual. Take him away."

As he was led away, the loudspeakers roared out: "The Brain will conduct a personal Hunt in the neighborhood of the village called Mickman's, beginning three hours from now. Servants of the Brain are warned to avoid this locality. Repeat to all servants of the Brain."

VIII

LIGGARD WONDERED WHY HE HAD BEEN given human guards when it would have been simpler just to lock one of the Meccanoes' tentacles round him, and decided that it could only be part

of the preparation for the very public execution the Brain was getting ready for him once the desired information had been abstracted.

At any rate, he was grateful for the reprieve. It gave him the chance in a thousand that, he felt just now, was all he needed to enable him to get clear. He had no illusions that the drones would release him, especially in view of what was likely to happen to them afterwards. But they were drones and, for all their apparent toughness, would need the whole of their five-to-one majority against him in a struggle.

Meanwhile there was a more pressing requirement. The drones did not hold him incommunicado, having had no instructions from the Brain as to that; and he was able to persuade one of the others, who was himself going in to Mickman's to warn a girl friend, to take a message to Patience. Then he settled back, contented, to pull the strings for his thousand-to-one chance of escape and life. If he could escape . . . The Brain would hunt him, of course, but the world was wide.

The thing to play on was the fatal capacity of the drones for getting bored, and the excessive emotionalism that went with that capacity. He didn't have to wait long for the first quality to display itself.

After less than an hour his guards were showing every sign of nervous irritability. Into this ripe atmosphere, he dropped his suggestion. "A game of tarpack?" he said.

Tarpack, a game played with cards, dice and counters, was one of the drones' most popular time-wasters and one that—even when played straight—led to brawling and fights fifty percent of the time. Moreover it was a game that divided into two equal sides of players—and he had no intention of playing it straight. A youthful prowess in sleight of hand was going to be very useful.

They were guarding him in a small compartment of one of the domiciliary domes. The door locked on both sides and had at first been locked inside and the key ostentatiously hung up on the other side of the room. But when one of them had gone outside for something in the first hour, he had come back and, with the usual carelessness of the drones, left the key in the keyhole and the door itself unlocked. The prisoner, after all, was behaving very well.

The game of tarpack progressed with increasing excitement. The thought of the seriousness of their charge was clearly slipping away in all their minds against the insistent claims of the mounting stakes. It was at this point that Stanley Liggard began playing the game his own way.

He palmed, he dealt crookedly, but in such a way as to give the advantages not to himself and the two drones who were his partners, but to the other three. The superiority became ridiculously lopsided. His two partners were cursing as the chips piled up on the other side of the table; and he joined in with them.

The moment was ripe.

The Tar Five counter had gone into the expanded deck five minutes before. Now, carefully, he dealt it back into the Supervisor's hand. The hand was turned up, and at once his two partners rose

in a fury of suspicion and accusation. He had been carefully seated on the opposite side of the table from the door, but this was now an advantage. He tipped the table, giving the impression that one of the others had done it. The table toppled forward onto the other three, and the whole scene became a melee. And at that point, without hesitation, he acted.

There was one drone directly between him and the door. He smashed an uppercut into his face, knocking him back onto the Supervisor. And then he was at the door, the key was wrenched out and in his hand, and he was through to the other side.

Fortunately the door opened outwards. He pressed all his weight against it, holding it against the fury of assault from the other side until he had clicked the key in the lock and it was secured. He raced along the corridor towards the outer air, hearing the loud outcry behind him, muffled by the intervening door. Luck was with him still. There was no one in the corridor and only one curious face, obviously non-comprehending, looked out from all the doors he dashed past.

Liggard reached the outer air, and ran on, steadily now, towards the quayside. If the door held the drones up only five minutes, he was sure he would be all right. With that much start he was sure they could not catch him, and sure also that they would not dare to report the event to any of the Brain's Meccanoes. The only thing left for them to do would be to scatter themselves—anywhere to get out of the Brain's range before the loss of the prisoner was discovered.

One or two drones outside the domes looked at him with amazement as he ran into the city, but made no attempt to stop him. He wanted one more piece of luck. As he reached the quay he thought it had deserted him—the motor boat was not tied up in its usual place. It might have stayed at the village with the last party. But then he saw it—at the next landing stage. It was empty. The engineer, as usual, had gone off into the domes.

He leapt on board, and within a minute or two the engine was chugging and the boat heading out from Los Angeles, northwards toward Mickman's.

THE VILLAGE WAS DESERTED. He hunted through it for five or ten minutes, calling Patience's name, but except for the howling of a dog there was no reply. The whole village had scattered before the warning, which the drone's girl friend must have spread to the others. They must have headed north, out of the danger zone.

He set off north himself, experiencing a kind of

anticlimax after the furious excitement of the previous hours. The sun was still quite high in a sky that was cloudless and infinite again. He trudged on, wondering what was going to happen.

If he found them—what then? The Brain was invulnerable. Would it always be? If he could prepare the conditions for another hibernation—for the three of them. Perhaps in a hundred years—two hundred years?

He faced the realities bleakly. A hundred years would only see the Brain more firmly entrenched as the cruel, whimsical god of a tormented world.

He was walking on, preoccupied with his gloom, and he could not at first believe it when he heard Patience's voice, itself strained with disbelief. "Stanley! How . . . ?"

She was sitting a little way off the road. He ran towards her eagerly.

"I got away. Where's Luther?"

Her face clouded. "We got the news about you. There was still the other canister."

"I don't understand," he said.

"The Brain's making a personal Hunt. Daddy's gone back—to be caught."

He looked at her dumbly.

"You know what happens on personal Hunts? The Brain lifts people right up against itself and . . ." She broke off for a moment. "He has the other plutonium capsule."

"It might work," Stanley said uncertainly. "The Brain would hardly be expecting any danger from that quarter, and would fail to take the precautions it took against me."

She said blankly: "In any case, he'll never return. We must go on. I don't know if we are out of range yet—"

He nodded. They moved on in silence through the hot afternoon. He could think of nothing else to say to ease her anguish.

They had gone perhaps a mile when the sky opened up like a cruel, glowing flower behind them. Liggard pulled Patience down, preventing her from turning towards that quickly fading sheet of sunburst. The noise, rocking them on the ground like the hand of a giant, followed. They stood up at last.

"I think . . ." he started to say.

Ten minutes later they knew. They passed a Meccano. It straddled the road drunkenly, still precariously upright on its three metal legs. The tentacles drooped from the cabin.

They walked beneath the steel corpse and on, together, towards the north. *Mission completed*, Liggard thought, his fingers tightening on the girl's trembling hand.

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*Between the stars there is no
journey's end for the brightest
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TWO MEN FACED GORDON GREENE as he came into the room. The young aide was a nonentity. The general was not. The commanding general sat where he should, at his own desk. It was placed squarely in the room, and yet the infinite courtesy of the general was shown by the fact that the blinds were so drawn that the light did not fall directly into the eyes of the person being interviewed.

At that time the Colonel General was Wenzel Wallenstein, the first man ever to venture into the very deep remoteness of space. He had not reached a star. Nobody had, at that time, but he had gone further than any man had ever gone before.

Wallenstein was an old man and yet the count of his years was not high. He was less than ninety in a period in which many men lived to one hundred and fifty. What made Wallenstein look old was not the suffering which came from mental strain, and the kind which came from anxiety and competition, or from ill health.

It was a subtler thing—a sensitivity which created its own painfulness. Yet it was real.

Wallenstein was as stable as men came and the young lieutenant was astonished to find that at his first meeting with the commander in chief that his instinctive emotional reaction should be one of quick sympathy for the man who commanded the entire organization.



"Your name?" he asked.

The lieutenant answered, "Gordon Greene." He started to say more, and then seemed to think better of it.

"Born that way?"

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"No, Sir," was the young man's prompt reply.

"What was your name originally?"

"Giordano Verdi."

"Why did you change? Verdi is a great name too."

"People just found it hard to pronounce, sir. I went along the best I could."

"I kept my name," said the old general with a trace of irritation in his voice. "I suppose it is a matter of taste."

The young lieutenant lifted his hand, left hand, palm outward, in the new salute which had been devised by the psychologists. He knew that this meant military courtesy could be passed by for the moment and that the subordinate officer was requesting permission to speak as man-to-man. He knew the salute and yet in these surroundings he did not altogether trust it.

The general's response was quick. He countersigned, left hand, palm outward.

The heavy, tired, wise, strained old face showed no change of expression. The General was alert. Mechanically friendly, his eyes followed the lieutenant. The lieutenant was sure that there was nothing behind those eyes, except world upon world of inward troubles.

The lieutenant spoke again, this time on confident ground.

"Is this a special interview, general? Do you have something in mind for me? If it is, sir, let me warn you, I have been declared to be psychologically unstable. Personnel doesn't often make a mistake but they may have sent me in here under error."

The general smiled. The smile itself was mechanical. It was a control of muscles—not a quick spring of human emotion.

"You will know well enough what I have in mind when we talk together, lieutenant. I am going to have another man sit with me and it will give you some idea of what your life is leading you toward. You know perfectly well that you have asked for deep space and that so far as I'm concerned you've gotten it. The question is now: Do you really want it? Do you want to take it? Is that all that you wanted to abridge courtesy for?"

"Yes, sir," said the lieutenant.

"You didn't have to call for the courtesy sign for that kind of a question. You could have asked me even within the limits of service. Let's not get too psychological. We don't need to, do we?"

Again the general gave the lieutenant a heavy smile.

Wallenstein gestured to the aide, who sprang to attention.

Wallenstein said, "Send him in."

The aide said, "Yes, sir."

The two men waited expectantly. With a springy, lively, quick, happy step a strange lieutenant entered the room.

Gordon Greene had never seen anybody quite like that lieutenant. The officer was old, almost as old as the general. His face was cheerful and unlined. The muscles of his cheeks and forehead bespoke happiness, relaxation, an assured view of life. The lieutenant wore the three highest decorations of his service. There weren't any others higher and yet there he was, an old man and still a lieutenant.

Lieutenant Greene couldn't understand it. He didn't know who this man was. It was easy enough for a young man to be a lieutenant but not for a man in his seventies or eighties. People that age were colonels, or retired, or out. Or they had gone back to civilian life. Space was a young man's game.

The general himself arose in courtesy to his contemporary. Lieutenant Greene's eyes widened. This too was odd. The general was not known to violate courtesy at all irregularly.

"Sit down, sir," said the strange old lieutenant.

The general sat.

"What do you want with me now? Do you want to talk about the Nancy routine one more time?"

"The Nancy routine?" asked the general blindly.

"Yes, sir. It's the same story I've told these youngsters before. You've heard it and I've heard it, so there's no use of pretending."

The strange lieutenant said, "My name's Karl Vonderleyen. Have you ever heard of me?"

"No, sir," said the young lieutenant.

The old lieutenant said, "You will."

"Don't get bitter about it, Karl," said the general. "A lot of other people have had troubles, besides you. I went and did the same things you did, and I'm a general. You might at least pay me the courtesy of envying me."

"I don't envy you, general. You've had your life, and I've had mine. You know what you've missed, or you think you do, and I know what I've had, and I'm sure I do."

The old lieutenant paid no more attention to the commander in chief. He turned to the young man and said,

"You're going to go out into space and we are putting on a little act, a vaudeville act. The general didn't get any Nancy. He didn't ask for Nancy. He didn't turn for help. He got out into the up-and-out; he pulled through it. Three years of it."

He paused an instant, then went on quickly, "Three years that are closer to three million years, I suppose. He went through hell and he came back. Look at his face. He's a success. He's an utter, blasted success, sitting there worn out, tired and, it would seem, hurt. Look at me. Look at me carefully, lieutenant. I'm a failure. I'm a lieutenant and the space service keeps me that way."

The commander-in-chief said nothing, so Vonderleyen talked on. "Oh, they will retire me as a general, I suppose, when the time comes. I'm not ready to retire. I'd just as soon stay in the space service as anything else. There is not much to do in this world. I've had it."

"Had what, sir?" Lieutenant Greene dared to ask.

"I found Nancy. He didn't," he said. "That's as simple as it is."

The general cut back into the conversation. "It's not that bad and it's not that simple, Lieutenant Greene. There seems to be something a little wrong with Lieutenant Vonderleyen today. The story is one we have to tell you and it is something you have to make up your own mind about. There is no regulation way of handling it."

The general looked very sharply at Lieutenant

Greene. "Do you know what we have done to your brain?"

"No, sir." Greene felt uneasiness rising in him.

"Have you heard of the sokta virus?"

"The what, sir?"

"The sokta virus. Sokta is an ancient word, gets its name from Chosen-mal—the language of Old Korea. That was a country west of where Japan used to be. It means 'maybe' and it is a 'maybe' that we put inside your head. It is a tiny crystal, more than microscopic. It's there. There is actually a machine on the ship, not a big one because we can't waste space.

"That machine has sufficient resonance to detonate the virus. If you detonate sokta, you will be like him. If you don't, you will be like me assuming, in either case, that you live. You may not live and you may not get back, in which case what we are talking about is purely academic."

The young man nerved himself to ask, "What does this do to me? Why do you make this big fuss over it?"

"We can't tell you too much. One reason is it is not worth talking about."

"You mean you really can't, sir?"

The general shook his head sadly and wisely.

"No, I missed it, he got it, and yet it somehow gets out beyond the limits of talking."

At this point while he was telling the story, many years later, I asked my cousin, "Well Gordon, if they said you can't talk about it, how can you?"

"Drunk, man, drunk," said the cousin. "How long do you think it took me to wind myself up to this point? I'll never tell it again—never again. Anyhow, you're my cousin, you don't count. And I promised Nancy I wouldn't tell anybody."

"Who's Nancy?" I asked him.

"Nancy is what it's all about. That is what the story is. That's what those poor old goops were trying to tell me in the office. They didn't know. One of them, he had Nancy; the other one, he hadn't."

"Is Nancy a real person?"

With that he told me the rest of the story.

THE INTERVIEW WAS HARSH. It was clean, stark, simple, direct. The alternatives were flat. It was perfectly plain that Wallenstein wanted Greene to come back alive. It was actual space command policy to bring the man back as a live failure instead of letting him become a dead hero. Pilots were not that common. Furthermore morale would be worsened if men were told to go out on suicide operations.

The whole thing was psychological and before Greene got out of the room he was more confused than when he went in.

They kept telling them, both of them in their different ways—the general happily, the old lieutenant unhappily—that this was serious. The grim old general was very cheerful about telling him. The happy lieutenant kept being very sympathetic.

Greene himself wondered why he could be so sympathetic toward the commanding general and be so perfectly care-free about an old lieutenant

who seemed such a failure. His sympathies should have been the other way around.

Fifteen hundred million miles later, four months later in ordinary time, four lifetimes later by the time which he'd gone through, Greene found out what they were talking about. It was an old psychological teaching. The men died if they were left utterly alone.

The ships were designed to be protected against that. There were two men on each ship. Each ship had a lot of tapes, even a few quite unnecessary animals and in this case a pair of hamsters had been included on the ship. They had been sterilized of course, to avoid the problem of feeding the young, but nevertheless they made a little family of their own in a miniature replica of life's happiness on earth. And Earth was very far away.

At that point, his co-pilot died. Everything that had threatened Greene then came true.

Greene suddenly realized what they were talking about.

The hamsters were his one hope. He thrust his face close to their cage and talked to them. He attributed moods to them. He tried to live their lives with them, just as if they were people.

As if he, himself, were a part of people still alive and not out there with the screaming silence beyond the thin wall of metal. There was nothing to do except to roam like a caged animal in machinery which he would never understand.

Time lost its perspectives. He knew he was crazy and he knew that by training he could survive the partial craziness. He even realized that the instability in his own personality which had made him think that he wouldn't fit the space service probably contributed to the hope that walked arm and arm with service to this point.

His mind kept coming back to Nancy and to the sokta virus. What was it they had said?

They had told him that he could waken Nancy, whoever Nancy was. Nancy was no pet name of his. And yet somehow or other the virus always worked. He only needed to move his head toward a certain point, press the resonating stud on the wall. One pressure, and his mission would fail. He would be happy, he would come home alive.

He couldn't understand it. Why such a choice?

It seemed three thousand years later that he dictated his last message back to Space Service. He didn't know what would happen. Obviously, that old lieutenant Vonderleyen, or whatever his name was, was still alive. Equally obviously the general was alive. The general had pulled through. The lieutenant hadn't.

And now, Lieutenant Greene, fifteen hundred million miles out in space had to make his choice. He made it. He decided to fail.

But he wanted, as a matter of discipline, to speak up for the man who was failing and he dictated, for the records of the ship when it got back to earth, a very simple message concluding with an appeal for justice.

"... and so, gentlemen, I have decided to activate the stud. I do not know what the reference to Nancy signifies. I have no concept of what the sokta virus will do except that it will make me fail. For this I am heartily ashamed. I regret the hu-

man weakness that has driven me to take this step. The weakness is human and you, gentlemen, have allowed for it. In this respect, it is not I who am failing, but the space service itself in giving me an authorization to fail. Gentlemen, forgive the bitterness with which I say *goodbye* to you in these last dreadful seconds."

He stopped dictating, blinked his eyes, took one last look at the hamsters—what might they not be by the time the *sokta* virus went to work?—pressed the stud and leaned forward.

Nothing happened. He pressed the stud again.

The ship suddenly filled with a strange odor. He couldn't identify the odor. He didn't know what it was.

It suddenly came to him that this was new-mown hay with a slight tinge of geraniums, possibly of roses, too, on the far side. It was a smell that was common on the back-country farm a few years ago where he had gone for a summer. It was the smell of his mother being on the porch and calling him back to a meal, and of himself, enough of a man to be indulgent even toward the woman in his own mother, enough of a child to turn happily back to a familiar voice.

He said to himself, "If this is all there is to that virus, I can take it and work on with continued efficiency."

He added, "At fifteen hundred million miles out, with nothing but two hamsters to provide solace during years of loneliness, a few hallucinations won't hurt me any."

The door opened. It couldn't open, but it did nevertheless.

At this point, Greene knew a fear more terrible than any fright or unnerving experience he had ever encountered. He said to himself, "I'm crazy, I'm crazy," and stared at the opening door.

A girl stepped in. She said, "Hello, you there. You know me, don't you?"

Greene said, "No, no, miss, who are you?"

The girl didn't answer. She just stood there, quietly smiling at him.

She wore a blue serge skirt cut so that it had broad, vertical stripes, a neat little waist, a belt of the same material, a very simple blouse. She was not a strange girl and she was by no means a creature of outer space.

She was somebody he had known and known well. Perhaps loved. He just couldn't place her—not at that moment, not in that place.

She still stood staring at him. That was all.

It came to him then. Of course. She was Nancy. She was not just the Nancy they had been talking about. She was *his* Nancy, his own Nancy he had always known and never met before.

He managed to pull himself together and say it to her. "You're Nancy and I've known you all my life and I have always wanted to marry you. You are the girl I've always been in love with, the girl I never saw before. That's funny, Nancy. It's terribly funny. I don't understand it, do you?"

Nancy came over and put her hand on his forehead. It was a real little hand and her presence was dear and precious and very welcome to him. She said, "It's going to take a bit of thinking. You see, I am not real—not to anybody except you.

And yet I am more real to you than anything else will ever be. That is what the *sokta* virus is, darling. It's me. I'm you."

He stared at her. He could have been unhappy but he didn't feel unhappy. He was so glad to have her there.

He said, "What do you mean? The *sokta* virus has made you? Am I crazy? Is this just a hallucination?"

Nancy shook her head and her pretty curls spun. "It's not that. I'm simply every girl that you ever wanted. I am the illusion that you always wanted but I am you because I am in the depths of you. I am everything that your mind might not have encountered in life. Everything that you might have been afraid to dig up. Here I am and I'm going to stay. And as long as we are here in this ship with the resonance we will get along well."

My cousin at this point began weeping. He picked up a wine flask and poured down a big glass of heavy Dago Red. For a while he cried. Putting his head on the table, he looked up at me and said, "It's been a long, long time. It's been a very long time and I still remember how she talked with me. And I see now why they say you talk about it. A man has got to be fearfully drunk to tell about a real life that he had and a good one, and a beautiful one and let it go, doesn't he?"

"That's right," I said, to be encouraging.

NANCY CHANGED THE SHIP right away. She moved the hamsters. She changed the decorations. She checked the records. The work went on more efficiently than ever before.

But the home they made for themselves, that was something different. It had baking smells, and it had wind smells, and sometimes he would hear the rain, although the nearest rain by now was one thousand six hundred million miles away, and there was nothing but the grating of cold silence on the cold, cold metal at the outside of the ship.

They lived together. It didn't take long for them to get thoroughly used to each other. He had been born Giordano Verdi. He had limitations.

And the time came for them to get even more close than lover and lover. He said, "I just can't take you darling. That is not the choice which love makes when it is free to chose. You are real enough to me. Will you marry me out of the prayer book?"

Her eyes lit up and her incomparable lips gleamed in a smile that was all peculiarly her own. She said, "Of course."

She flung her arms around him. He ran his fingers over the bones of her shoulder. He felt her ribs. He felt the individual strands of her hair brushing his cheeks. This was real. This was more real than life itself. Yet some fool had told him that it was a virus—that Nancy didn't exist. "If this isn't Nancy, what is real?" he thought.

He put her down and, alive with love and happiness, he read the prayer book. He asked her to make the responses. He said, "I suppose I'm captain, and I suppose I have married you and me, haven't I, Nancy?"

The marriage went well. The ship followed an immense perimeter like that of a comet. It went

far out. So far that the sun became a remote dot. The interference of the solar system had virtually no effect on the instruments.

Nancy came to him one day and said, "I suppose you know why you are a failure now."

"No," he said.

She looked at him gravely. She said, "I think with your mind. I live in your body. If you die while on this ship, I die too. Yet as long as you live, I am alive and separate. That's funny, isn't it?"

"Funny," he said, an old new pain growing in his heart.

"And yet I can tell you something which I know with that part of your mind I use. I know without you that I am. I suppose I recognize your technical training and feel it somehow, even though I don't feel the lack of it. I had the education you thought I had, and you wanted me to have. But do you see what's happening?"

We are working with our brain at almost half-power instead of one-tenth power. All your imagination is going into making me. All your extra thoughts are of me. I want them, just as I want you to love me, but there are none left over for

emergencies and there is nothing left over for the Space Service. Am I worth it?"

"Of course you are worth it, darling. You're worth anything that any man could ask of a sweetheart, a wife and a true companion."

"But don't you see? I am taking all the best of you, your creativeness, your youth, your dreams and when the ship comes home there won't be any me."

In a strange way he realized that what she said was true. The drug was working. He could see what was happening to himself. As he looked at her with her shimmering hair he realized the hair needed no prettying or hairdos. He looked at her clothes and realized that she wore clothes for which there was no space on the ship. And yet she changed them, delightfully, winsomely, attractively, day in and day out.

She even ate food that he knew couldn't be on the ship. But none of this worried him. And now he couldn't even be worried at the thought of losing Nancy herself. Any other thought he could have rejected subconsciously and could have surrendered to the idea that it was not a hallucination after all. She belonged to him forever now.

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oblivion especially
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Cyrano de Bergerac

SWORDSMAN OF SPACE

Rostand's play, "Cyrano de Bergerac" has become an enduring legacy of the theater. But the man behind the legend was even more remarkable, for the living Cyrano's imaginary trip to the moon blazes across history.

By

SAM MOSKOWITZ



Cyrano de Bergerac

*Physicist and dreamer . . . these,
Rhymer, musician, fighter an it please,
And sailor of aerial seas
Swordsmen whose parry was attack
Lover, lacking all love's keys;
Here he lies, this Hercules
Savien Cyrano Bergerac,
All and nothing. Rest in Peace.*

—Edmond Rostand

CYRANO DE BERGERAC collapses only minutes after he has revealed to the beautiful Roxane that it was he and not Christian who had written those inspired love letters to her. The secret that has eaten like a slow malignancy at his happiness and well-being for more than fourteen years is at last known.

The fact that Roxane now realizes that she really loved the great spirit who had combined his wit and facile pen with the handsome figure of Christian, to win vicariously, the love of a woman whom he dared not woo, fearing that the ugliness of his gigantic nose would lead to a rebuff, provides small comfort to Cyrano, for he knows he is dying. His oldest and dearest friend, Henry Le Bret, arrives at the nunnery garden, prompted by a premonition that Cyrano has met with foul play.

Tenderly as a mother, Le Bret bends over the prone figure of Cyrano, and then, indicating the moonlight filtering through the branches of a tree, sobs: "Thy other love!"



At first glance Cyrano's flying machine may provoke a smile of amusement, but it was actually far in advance of the aeronautical thinking of the seventeenth century, and it must be remembered that the streamlined proportions of the Jupiter rocket are a very recent development. The flying machine is depicted in the drawing on the left. Below, we see Cyrano himself en route to the moon, his arms outspread as if to embrace a daring, imperishable dream.

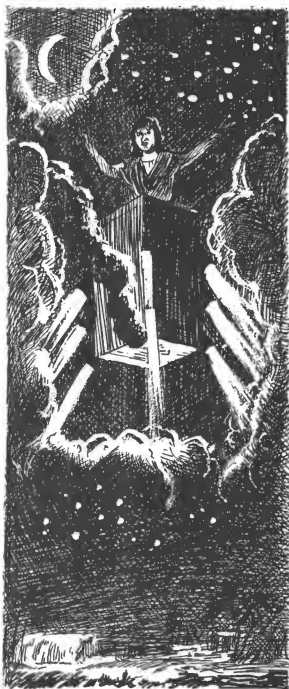


Cyrano, smiling and addressing the moon, says: "Welcome, fair friend above!" Then, ignoring Roxane's lament, "I loved but once, and twice I lose my love," he whispers to Le Bret, "I'll journey to that moonland opaline, unhampered—ch, Le Bret?—by a machine."

"What are you saying?" Roxane asks, thinking Cyrano is delirious.

He replies: "I shall have one prize. They'll let me have the moon for paradise. In yonder sphere, we shall hold converse high, Galileo, and Socrates and I."

The quoted lines are from Edmond Rostand's



masterpiece, *CYRANO DE BERGERAC*, written in 1897, a play that has charmed and thrilled millions on the stage and in the cinema. Of that play, Jay B. Hubbell, and John O. Beaty, in their book, *AN INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA* say: "On the stage the sharp contrast between extreme ugliness and greatness of soul is startlingly effective. Cyrano, however, is, for all his charm, a bundle of fine points for the actor rather than a living man like Hamlet or Falstaff. And yet on the stage the play is so effective that we are swept off our feet and our critical faculties are paralyzed. *CYRANO*, if not a great tragedy, is, in spite of its faults, one of the best of contemporary plays."

Yet the irony of it is that Hamlet and Falstaff were fictional characters, woven out of whole cloth by their authors, but Cyrano was real. Cyrano de Bergerac really lived! Making allowances for the justifiable poetic license exercised by Rostand, the play is essentially built on fact.

Cyrano de Bergerac was a very famous man indeed. He was not only the greatest fencer of his time, but a poet, playwright, philosopher and an acolyte of science. And he was endowed with a nose virtually as monstrous—although naturally not quite as large—as the one in the play and was inordinately sensitive about it. While the audience may have, between their sniffings, regarded the quoted references to the moon from Rostand's play as a bit of colorful trimming to adorn a romance, *they were in reality an acknowledgement of de Bergerac's role as the greatest science fiction writer of his century!*

His most famous work, *A VOYAGE TO THE MOON*, went into nine editions in France and two translations into English between the years 1650 and 1687. Previous to its publication it was extensively circulated in manuscript form, and read by many of his more distinguished contemporaries.

Unlike other romancers, utopians and satirists of the period, who wrote occasional works of primitive science fiction as a convenient means of forwarding a particular political or social concept, de Bergerac persisted in his literary endeavors and wrote a sequel to *A VOYAGE TO THE MOON* entitled *A VOYAGE TO THE SUN*. The story, though apparently incomplete, was no mere fragment, for it exceeded in length *A VOYAGE TO THE MOON*. A third science fiction novel, *THE STORY OF THE SPARK*, is referred to in contemporary writings, but the actual manuscript was stolen and has never been found.

The nature of Cyrano de Bergerac's life was so truly fabulous that it must be offered as a prelude to a discussion of his works of science fiction, if they are to be effectively understood and appreciated.

Cyrano de Bergerac was baptized Savinien de Cyrano II, March 6, 1619. He was the fifth of six children sired by Abel de Cyrano, and was born on his father's estate near Paris. Though his father was an educated man and moderately well off, he was not of noble birth. On the contrary, Cyrano's grandfather had made his fortune as a fish merchant!

At a country private school, Cyrano met Henry

Le Bret, who was to become his lifelong friend and who is included as a character in Rostand's play. Personality conflicts with his instructor resulted in Cyrano's transfer to the Collège de Beauvais in Paris. This was literally jumping from the frying pan into the fire since the headmaster at Paris proved even more insufferable to a boy of Cyrano's precocious temperament than the rural private-school tutor who, like his predecessor, believed that the rod was a more effective road to learning than reason. What was worse, he quite brutally exercised that conviction.

Cyrano completed his studies at Beauvais in 1637 and one year later, at the age of nineteen, entered the Gascon guard, which was commanded by M. de Carbon de Casteljaloux. The Gascon guard was famous for the large number of noblemen in its ranks and Cyrano's membership in that select corps gave the erroneous impression that he was born to honor, a misconception which Cyrano did nothing to discourage. Actually, it was his remarkable ability as a swordsman that caused the unit to overlook his background and accept him on merit.

The truth about Cyrano's swordsmanship is more fantastic than the legend which is presented in Rostand's play. On one occasion a poet friend, Chevalier de Lignières, came running to Cyrano pleading for help. It seemed that Lignières had spread some off-color talk concerning a ranking lord of the area. Learning that the lord had hired a group of men to waylay and teach him the error of his ways, he dared not go home. De Bergerac courageously decided to see his friend safely to his door. They were jumped by one hundred swordsmen. The battle raged furiously while Lignières cowered in a doorway. In what must surely be one of the great sword battles of all times, Cyrano killed two of the attackers, wounded seven and routed the rest. Then he nonchalantly escorted his friend home.

Such a story would normally be dismissed as a fantastic exaggeration, were it not for the fact that it was substantiated by two witnesses of such reliability that historians have accepted it without question. The witnesses were M. de Cuigy, son of an Advocate of the Parliament of Paris and Mestre de Camp of the Prince de Conti's regiment.

We find, then, that the young Cyrano was truly as lion-hearted an individual and as skilled a swordsman as the most imaginative writer would have dared to invent. Certainly no author of a work of fiction would consider investing his hero with the ability to single-handedly defeat that number of swordsmen and no reader would believe it if he did. But in the case of Cyrano, truth is stranger than fiction.

Equally in conformity with the historical record was the fact that Cyrano fought dozens of duels at real and imagined slights to his nose. There is no question that Cyrano had a proboscis of truly unique proportions. Though not as grotesque as the one utilized by Jose Ferrer in the moving picture version of the play, the four known portraits of Cyrano reveal it as being incontestably an immense beak and this despite the fact that the portrait painters must certainly have made some at-

tempt to minimize and streamline its proportions.

Cyrano himself said of his olfactory organ: "This veridic nose arrives everywhere a quarter of an hour before its master. Ten shoemakers, good round fat ones too, go and sit down to work under it out of the rain."

Cyrano could say such things about himself and have it construed as wit, but woe betide the unwary acquaintance who even as much as *looked* too hard at his nose. Duels inspired by his nose were responsible for Cyrano killing at least ten people and undoubtedly wounding many more.

Not only humans, but at least one poor ape died as a result of de Bergerac's nose. Timed for a performance just previous to his arrival, an ape was dressed like Cyrano, and given a sword and an artificial nose of heroic size by Brioché, a man who ran a marionette theatre near Point-Neuf. The ape was ordinarily used as a means of attracting attention to Brioché's show, and was billed under the name of Fagotin. When Cyrano appeared and viewed this parody of himself, he unsheathed his sword and, driving the crowd right and left, lunged at the poor ape and ran him through.

The owner of the marionette show sued Cyrano for damages.

Regaling the authorities with the dubious logic that since all of this happened within the theatre, the realm of art, Cyrano succeeded in getting the case dropped by offering to pay in the "coin of the realm," and proceeded to write a poem immortalizing the unfortunate ape. At least, so the story goes.

That Cyrano could be a bully as well as a gallant is best illustrated by his feud with Montfleury, an exceedingly fat actor of the period who was also a playwright. On one occasion, Cyrano forced Montfleury to cease acting in a play half way through the performance and forbade him to appear again for a month on pain of death. When the actor did appear two days later, Cyrano once again drove him from the stage. The booing and hissing of the audience resulted in Cyrano challenging all present to a duel. No one took him up.

It was only after Cyrano had been severely wounded in military combat several times that he turned seriously to the arts. He was wounded once when a musket-ball passed through his body and again when his throat was cut by a sword.

His period of serious writing commences from the year 1643. Ironically, it is the relatively quieter period from this date to 1653 which is the least known portion of his fantastic life. While he bombastically and colorfully flaunted his swordsmanship, there always seemed to have been someone to record his achievements, but when he settled down to serious writing, only his works remain to speak for him and some of these were posthumously mutilated.

A VOYAGE TO THE MOON is the work for which he is best known today, but one of his plays, the poetic tragedy AGRIPPINA still has substantial support as an outstanding work of the French theatre. Curtis Hidden Page says of THE DEATH OF AGRIPPINA that it "is worthy not only to be ranked with the best dramas of his contemporaries except

Corneille, but even to be at least compared with Corneille's better work (except perhaps for THE CID and POLYEUCTE)."

Richard Aldington, another student of Cyrano de Bergerac, substantiates Page when he says: "THE DEATH OF AGRIPPINA has been compared favorably with Corneille's minor tragedies . . . The play is well written and impressive."

This establishes that even if de Bergerac had not written his famous interplanetary stories, he would have earned a minor place in the classical drama of France, and that basically his stylistic quality was far above that of Lucian, Francis Godwin, Johannes Kepler and other writers of the interplanetary voyage who preceded him.

A VOYAGE TO THE MOON and A VOYAGE TO THE SUN occupy a special place in the history of science fiction, even though they are not the first interplanetary ever written, the first in which a machine is constructed to carry its passengers to another world, or the first to use science fiction as a medium for contemporary satire.

True, they blend all of these qualities and in so doing display just how rich an ore it is possible to mine in the writing of science fiction. But their real importance lies in their prodigious effort to free science fiction from its previous burden of utopianism and superstition. Cyrano wrestles with the unknown wherever he encounters it. He attempts to sidestep nothing. Cyrano avers there is a logical reason for everything, and he tries to give it.

Cyrano's personal struggle as expressed in A VOYAGE TO THE MOON, is the struggle of his times. Not too long out of the Dark Ages, the world was slowly freeing itself from an appalling concretion of superstition and ignorance. With the mystical as well as theological truths of his age literally whipped into him during the educational period of his youth, de Bergerac now swung to the other extreme, became a free thinker and attempted to make reason prevail.

There are places where Cyrano obviously is unaware that he has substituted mythology for fact. There are times when his careful scientific explanations fall apart on close examination, and he lapses into the prejudices and misconceptions of the masses. But for the most part his instincts were correct and he frequently arrived at the right answers, despite the gaps in his knowledge or the error of his method.

When the final history of space travel is written, Cyrano de Bergerac will have to be enshrined as the first man to think of rockets as a propellant medium for a space vehicle. In A VOYAGE TO THE MOON, de Bergerac's hero spends weeks experimenting on a space ship, several models failing to get off the ground. Success crowns his efforts when some Canadians tie rockets to his space shell and he is fired aloft.

High in the atmosphere, the rockets give out, but fortunately Cyrano had rubbed himself with bone marrow, to ease the bruises of a previously unsuccessful flight. Since it was popularly believed in Cyrano's time that the sun sucked up bone marrow, our hero was carried by this method through space, ultimately to land on the moon.

The moon turns out to be inhabited by humanoid creatures that go about on all fours. However, it is interesting to note that Cyrano makes a point of stressing the light gravitational pull of the moon, by relating how the inhabitants are able to 'fan' themselves through the air.

In his two novels, Cyrano makes seven different suggestions for defying gravity to reach the moon and all seven are incorporated in Rostand's play!

In addition to the detailed descriptions of the methods of rocketry and the sun's affinity to bone marrow we have the following:

"One way was to stand naked in the sunshine, in a harness thickly studded with glass phials, each filled with morning dew. The sun in drawing up the dew, you see, could not have helped drawing me up too!"

"Or else, mechanic as well as artificer, I could have fashioned a giant grasshopper, with steel joints, which, impelled by successive explosions of saltpetre, would have hopped with me to the azure meadows where graze the starry flocks." This comes fairly close to the actual employment of an internal combustion engine.

"Since smoke by its nature ascends, I could have blown into an appropriate globe a sufficient quantity to ascend with me."

"Or else, I could have placed myself upon an iron plate, have taken a magnet of suitable size, and thrown it in the air! That way is a very good one! The magnet flies upward, the iron instantly after; the magnet no sooner overtaken than you fling it up again . . . the rest is clear! You can go upward indefinitely." In descending upon the moon, Cyrano would occasionally throw the magnet up to break the speed of descent. He had its problems well thought out!

"Draw wind into a vacuum—keep it tight—rarefy them, by glowing mirrors, pressed Issaehedron-wise within a chest." This method Cyrano used to go to the sun, forcing the expanded air out in a ramjet principle.

After reaching the moon, Cyrano very clearly and definitely establishes the fact that the earth and the other planets revolve around the sun and that the sun is the center of the solar system. Lest this be regarded as a rather elementary observation, it should be noted that only sixteen years before Cyrano made this statement, Galileo, on his knees before the Inquisition, recanted the "heresy" that his telescope had confirmed.

Cyrano observes that the fixed stars are other suns with planets about them and offers the opinion that the universe is infinite. This view, of course, is no longer held by the majority of modern astrophysicists.

Earth was off, as were the other planets, by fragments thrown off from the sun as it cooled, thought Cyrano. It even seemed likely that the sun spots were new planets in formation.

In one of his experiments, Cyrano uses a parachute to safely descend to the earth, possibly obtaining this idea from Leonardo da Vinci.

On the moon, Cyrano meets creatures that are able to alter their forms at will, a device tremendously popular in science fiction in recent years. These moon dwellers visited Earth in pre-

historic ages and gave rise to the stories of mythological monsters and pagan gods that have been passed down to us.

He discovers that these people are actually from the sun and are capable of living thousands of years by transferring their intelligences to new bodies when the old ones wear out.

On the moon, the people eat by inhaling the vapors of food. They have embraced the concept—previously unheard of in Cyrano's time—of going to doctors to keep well and taking preventive medicine, instead of waiting until they are ill.

Certainly the most advanced and astonishing theories in his book are those concerning atoms. Cyrano at great length and with prophetic insight insists that the entire world is composed of infinitesimal bits of matter called 'atoms' and that these make up all known elements. He points out that earth, water, fire and air are merely different arrangements and densities of the same atomic matter.

The formation of life on our planet was a matter of chance, Cyrano felt. In his opinion, in the vastness of the universe, infinite combinations of conditions were capable of occurring and on this planet, the chemical and climatic conditions formed a blend that accidentally created life forms here.

Previous to the appearance of de Bergerac's moon story, a volume entitled *THE MAN IN THE MOON: or a Discourse of a Voyage Thither*, by Domingo Gonsales, was published in 1638. The book was written by Frances Godwin and as part of the story, his hero, Domingo Gonsales, travels to the moon with birds serving as the motive power for a contraption he has built. Cyrano meets Gonsales on the moon, thereby inadvertently acknowledging his imaginative debt to the earlier writer.

Of course, Cyrano de Bergerac's wide reading was the source of most of the ideas he expounds and he quite honestly gives credit where credit is due in the text of his work. He praises Girolamo Cardan, Italian mathematician who gained a great reputation during the 16th century; Johannes Kepler, scientist whose moon story *SOMNIUM* appeared first in 1638; Tommaso Campanella, author of the classic utopia, *CITY OF THE SUN*, who is actually used as one of the characters in de Bergerac's *A VOYAGE TO THE SUN*; Gasendi, who deplored the concepts of Aristotle and Descartes—there is a story extant that Cyrano forced his way into the lectures of this man at swordpoint, so anxious was he to absorb his theories—and literally dozens of others including Lucian, Sorel, Pythagoras, Epicurus, Democritus, Copernicus, Rabelais, Rehaalt, Trithem and Nostradamus.

The ideas of all these men and many more profoundly influenced Cyrano's thinking and references to them abound in such profusion in his two interplanetary novels that it is small wonder that Marjorie Nicholson, in her scholarly work, *VOYAGES TO THE MOON*, appraises Cyrano's works as "the most brilliant of all seventeenth century parodies of the cosmic voyage."

Cyrano's careful description of a machine on the moon that records and plays back voices, written in 1648, greatly impressed anthologists Marjorie

Fischer and Rolfe Humphries, so much so, in fact, that they included the excerpt in their book, *STRANGE TO TELL*, published by Julian Messner in 1946. Similarly, Cyrano's prediction of radiant bulbs providing artificial light on the moon, belongs in the category of first-rate prognostication.

Because of the numerous and carefully worked out scientific opinions, theories and extrapolations included in Cyrano's *VOYAGES* we are sometimes inclined to lose sight of the fact that they are also biting satires, appraising the beliefs, customs and laws of mankind as well as the possibility of future invention.

Cyrano de Bergerac was opposed to organized religion, believing that it was responsible for more evils than it cured. Strangely, for a man himself a firebrand and master swordsman, he did not believe that physical force in itself proved anything and he scoffed at the concept of courage, attributing it to men too brutal and ignorant to understand the danger or consequences of their acts. Cyrano deplored 'Momism' centuries before Philip Wylie thought of the term in *GENERATION OF VIPERS* and caustically castigates the mothers and fathers who established an emotional despotism over their children, making selfish demands merely because they sired and begat them.

De Bergerac was firmly convinced that a great many illnesses were psychosomatic, laying stress on the fact that witch doctors were often able to effect cures in cases which had baffled the greatest of medical practitioners.

Amidst all this philosophy, the scientific marvels never ceased to come and the cities of the moon had some houses on wheels which by a combination of bellows and sails were moved at will about Earth's satellite to take advantage of climatic changes. The homes that were stationary rested on giant screws and in the winter dropped into immense underground cellars, protected from the harsh weather above. *A VOYAGE TO THE MOON*, despite its many flaws, was the most soundly scientific science fiction story of the period.

In narrative flow it is episodic and uneven, chopped into segments of action, science, philosophy, sociology. But it contains at least one pastoral description that is as beautiful and poetic a writing achievement as anything in 17th century literature.

A VOYAGE TO THE MOON depends for its effects upon the presentation of ideas, which must have been real shockers in the 17th century. It is in every sense of the term the first 'thought-variant' science fiction tale in history. It is intended to instruct, but above all else, it demands that the reader think for himself.

The sequel, *A VOYAGE TO THE SUN*, begins as a straight action adventure on earth, where Cyrano evades chastisement for the views in his first book. About one third of the way through the story, Cyrano carefully constructs a space ship from a six-by-three-foot box "closed so exactly that not a single grain of air could slip in except through two openings." The box has a globe on its summit, formed of crystal. "The vessel was expressly made with several angles, in the shape of an icosahedron, so that as each facet was convex and concave my globe produced the effect of a burning mirror . . .

I have told you that the sun beat vigorously upon my concave mirrors, and uniting its rays in the middle of the globe drove out with ardour through the upper vent the air inside; the globe became a vacuum and, since Nautre abhors a vacuum, she made it draw up air through the lower opening to fill itself . . . I should continue to rise, because the ether became wind through the furious speed with which it rushed through to prevent a vacuum and consequently was bound to force up my machine continually." For steering his vessel, Cyrano attached a sail!

Out in space, Cyrano calls attention to the difficulty of telling the difference between 'up' and 'down' in the interplanetary void, an observation extraordinary for his period.

He dwells ingeniously on possible life-tolerating variations in solar temperature and actually lands on one of the sun-spots which turns out to be a cooled area, much like our Earth.

On the sun, Cyrano indulges in some of his most savage satire, comparing human beings in a most unfavorable light to birds and to animals.

A VOYAGE TO THE SUN, initially published in 1662 as *THE COMIC HISTORY OF THE STATES AND EMPIRES OF THE SUN*, some years after Cyrano's death, is never brought to a finish, but breaks off abruptly. On whether or not the break was intentional there are two schools of thought. The outstanding de Bergerac scholar Richard Aldington, who was responsible for the first complete English translation of the unexpurgated manuscript of *A VOYAGE TO THE MOON*, raises strong doubts as to whether Cyrano de Bergerac deliberately closed the manuscript in that manner.

Other scholars point to the first authorized edition of the book, published in 1656, a year after Cyrano's death—edition was published without permission in 1650—where Cyrano has apparently added an addenda which does not appear in the manuscript. It reads: "But foreseeing, that it will put an end to all my Studies, and Travels; that I may be as good as my word to the Council of the World; I have begg'd of Monsieur Le Bret, my dearest and most constant Friend, that he would publish them with the *HISTORY OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE SUN*, that of the *SPARK*, and some other Pieces of my Composing, if those who have Stolen them from us restore them to him, as I earnestly adjure them to do."

The addenda, translated by A. Lovell, A.M. in 1687—whose edition was the best in English until Richard Aldington's in 1922, and the first in English to also include *A VOYAGE TO THE SUN*—indicates that Cyrano refers to the *SUN* as a completed work. It is possible that the ending to it may be discovered with *THE STORY OF THE SPARK*, the third of Cyrano's science fiction satires, if the stolen manuscript is ever located.

Ironically, though Cyrano's best friend was Henry le Bret and though he made le Bret his literary executor, le Bret, a staunch pillar of the church, dared not publish the *Cosmic Voyages* in their original form, containing as they did atheistic matter as well as scientific speculation contrary to theological dogma. He therefore hacked away some of Cyrano's most brilliant literary ripôstes and

toned down others until they made no sense.

Many contemporaries referred to Cyrano as a 'madman' because the Cosmic Voyages often appeared so disjointed, never dreaming that censorship was the culprit. Fortunately, the original manuscript of *A VOYAGE TO THE MOON* survived, but this is not the case with its sequel, *A VOYAGE TO THE SUN*, and we have no way of telling what was excised from that work unless the original manuscript is someday uncovered.

As it was, Cyrano's influence was monumental. Scores of authors imitated him. Tom d'Urfy's work, *WONDERS IN THE SUN OR THE KINGDOM OF THE BIRDS*, published in London in 1706 and used as the basis of an opera, is a direct steal from Cyrano, even to the use of his characters. But the most important author influenced by Cyrano de Bergerac is unquestionably Jonathan Swift, author of *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*.

Swift's biographers have never attempted to side-step his debt to Cyrano de Bergerac. As early as 1754, Samuel Derrick dedicated a new translation into English of *A VOYAGE TO THE MOON* . . . A COMICAL ROMANCE to Earl of Orrery, author of *REMARKS ON THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF JONATHAN SWIFT*, and gives as his reason "your Lordship's mentioning this work in your *LIFE OF SWIFT*" as the inspiration for *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*.

Literally dozens of instances of borrowing from Cyrano can be detected in *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS* but some of the most obvious are the "Houyhnhnms, in which men are put in a very poor light by comparing them to birds and beasts and a passage in chapter 6 of *Voyage to Lilliput*. "Their notions relating to the duties of parents and children differ extremely from ours, and when they come to the age of twenty moons they are supposed to have some rudiments of docility." This passage constitutes a direct rephrasing of Cyrano's views on 'Momism' and the relationship of children to their parents. It has been abbreviated slightly here, but its substance has not been altered.

In brief sections, the slashing satire contained in de Bergerac's works is every bit as powerful and effective as Swift's, but the quality is not sustained. Nevertheless, had Swift not arrived on the scene, completely eclipsing Cyrano with his satirical genius and evenness of style, the latter might be more commonly read and referred to today.

Commenting upon the manner in which a great French playwright, Moliere, adapted material from Cyrano's play, *THE PEDANT OUTWITTED*, for the two best scenes of *FOURBERIES DE SCAPIN*, Curtis Hidden Page concluded: "Real genius is finally, the essential thing, which Cyrano once

more just missed attaining—missed just by the lack of that simplicity, perhaps. But exaggeration, sometimes carried to the burlesque, is the essential trait which makes him what he is; and we cannot wish it away."

It seems almost as if it were not genius which Cyrano lacked, but the discipline essential to its full germination. His emotional temperament combined with his fierce independence stood in the way.

He died at the age of 35, possibly as the result of injuries received from a beam dropped on his head by his enemies. During the latter years of his life, he was sustained by the patronage of Duc d'Arpajon, but lost favor when the heretical nature of the material in his play, *THE DEATH OF AGRIPPINA*, became the scandal of Paris. Ailing from his 'accident', he was cared for at the home of Regnault des Bois-Clairs, a friend of le Bret, where three sisters from a convent labored ceaselessly to restore his faith in religion. They ultimately claimed success and de Bergerac was buried as a Christian.

To the world of science fiction Cyrano de Bergerac exercised a pioneering influence which preceded that of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells and the policies of Hugo Gernsback in the nineteen twenties.

The works and even the life of Cyrano de Bergerac might have been permanently relegated to scholarly obscurity had it not been for Edmond Rostand's play. Its first showing in 1897 created an instantaneous revival of interest. Not only did new editions of Cyrano's works appear in both France and England shortly thereafter but works of fiction such as *CAPTAIN SATAN*, by Louis Gallet, based factually on the life of the great-nosed gallant, gained popular favor.

Through Rostand's play, the world added to its gallery of legendary heroes the heroically pathetic figure of Cyrano de Bergerac. Cyrano of the ready wit, the poetic phrase, the flashing sword, the titanic nose and the crushing hopeless love. Audiences revel in the drama, never knowing that such a man truly lived and breathed. Never knowing the prophetic role he played in man's coming conquest of space.

His epitaph is simply and poetically framed beneath a 17th century engraving of an original portrait of Cyrano by Zacharie Heinec:

*All weary with the earth too soon
I took my flight into the skies,
Beholding there the sun and moon
Where now the Gods confront my eyes.*

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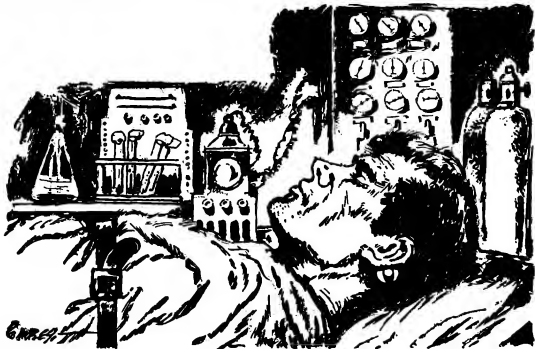
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AT YOUR OWN RISK

A DRAMATIC NOVELET OF THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW

by STANLEY MULLEN



Psychologists tell us that a man's conscience is the outcome of a conflict deep within his mind . . . a battle royal between the Super-Ego and the Id. But what would happen if the battle became mechanical and you just—well, pressed a button? Here's an answer that will astound you.

HE HAD TO STEAL AGAIN. It was not an impulse, but a compulsion. The difficulty was his conscience. For Carling, the voice of conscience—or social pressure, if you prefer—was a small metallic button deeply embedded in his skull behind his left ear.

It operated, not from Heaven or any other remote or alien control, but solely from electrical charges in his nerves from minute alterations in pulse rate, blood pressure, glandular secretions and general body chemistry. It acted more rapidly than any conscious physical or mental reaction he might have had to the social, economic and political pressures outside himself. It was reacting and operating even as he sat in Dr. Staples' office.

There was vibration below the level of audible sound—a vibration he would not have been able

to sense if it had not been inside his head. At the moment, there was no pain, only that gently nagging reminder—a warning.

Dr. Staples steepled his fingers and gazed thoughtfully at his patient. "For the moment, we'll skip your medical history," he said. "What seems to be troubling you?"

"My conscience," Carling said it without laughing. To him, it was a serious matter.

"What you need is a witch-doctor, not a neurosurgeon. Who sent you to me?"

"Nobody. Coming here was my own idea. My conscience is something in your line. I'm a convict with an OC button planted inside my skull. I figure if a neurosurgeon put it there, another can take it out."

Suspicion and curiosity blended on Dr. Staples

angular face. There was an odd note of pity in his voice. "If you have any such ideas, you still need a witch-doctor. Surely at the hospital they explained to you that any attempt to remove the button would be fatal."

Carling stared blankly in horror and disbelief. "Yes. They told me that. But I figured it was a gimmick, that they were lying, just to discourage me from trying any tricks. I'm not a man easy to convince. There never was a system so perfect it can't be flummoxed, if you find the right way."

"If you want my advice," the doctor said evenly, "you'll forget about it. Find work and start making an honest living. I can help you get a job if you'll let me. I've always been interested in crime. From the standpoint of criminal psychology, that is. You probably know that I helped originate some of the ideas incorporated in the mechanical conscience."

Carling nodded glumly. He knew Dr. Staples' interest in criminals. Since his release, Carling had spent many hours in the library studying crime in all its aspects, and the relation between the criminal and society. Many of the textapes had borne the doctor's byline. There had even been a detailed study of the development of penology on Venus and other frontier planets. Besides his eminence in neuro-surgery, Dr. Staples was the leading criminologist on Venus. It was a hobby with him.

It was impossible to successfully transfer a new civilization complete from the old, Staples had explained. On a new planet, there are new concepts of freedom, new aspects of responsibility, new problems and standards of procedure for dealing with them. But some of the old problems in human activities remain—problems.

Venus was different from Earth. At first, it had been a typical planetary frontier, with the usual difficulties of establishing permanent settlements, dealing with native life, and getting exploitation under way. For a time, Venusport had been a plague spot, even for a planetary beach-head, a rough, brawling, savagely lawless city with a polyglot population of drifters, promoters, sober and dedicated colonists, wildcat technicians, scientific students, and wanted criminals from all the cities and countries of Earth. That stage passed, changes were gradual, there was order of a sort, but Venus was still not the old Earth.

There were still criminals, of various kinds—but little time, patience or facilities for dealing with them. The next stage was ruthless suppression of crime, with penalties so severe that a public reaction was inevitable. Nobody wanted to return to the riotous, colorful years of guerilla warfare between society and its parasites, but the softer patterns of penology seemed no remedy. Venus was civilized, after its own fashion. Leading citizens held discussions. With so large a percentage of research men and engineers in its society, they thought that Venus should try a scientific approach. Dr. Staples had made a suggestion. Since technicians had already solved so many seemingly insoluble problems, why not turn their ingenuity to finding a mechanical or electronic deterrent to crime?

Technical details were classified TOPSEC, of
AT YOUR OWN RISK

course. The public, including the criminal elements, knew only that such a device had been constructed. It was tried, and some appalling tragedies occurred before the bugs were ironed out. But since the victims were convict volunteers, nobody bothered much about them.

Eventually the device had been adopted, and suitable laws passed to put it in practice. In the great majority of cases it worked. There were still criminals, and always would be as long as man is man—but there were few repeaters. Professional criminals, as such, became an almost vanishing class. There were only first offenders, and the few brazen incorrigibles too skilful or too lucky ever to have been caught.

Now a man became a criminal at his own risk. If caught, he was tried and sentenced, but only to wear a metallic conscience for the rest of his life. He was no longer punished, except at his own hands. Punishment, which could never be made to fit the crime, now fitted the criminal. Minor temptations short-circuited any impulse to yield to them by causing either a warning buzz or a sharp pricking sensation akin to an insect bite.

More drastic reactions to antisocial impulses ranged up the scale from stabbing pains to high-dolor headaches. Beyond that, if human weakness or determined wrongdoing reached out toward major temptations, there were hypnotic dampers or hypo injections of paralyzing drugs. In extreme cases, such as murder or treason, if the criminal persisted despite all warnings, death could strike from within his own skull—not as punishment, but as a practical deterrent.

In a sense, justice had become divinely impartial and incorruptible. Its dispensation was left up to the offender, who could take his punishment even as he perpetrated his misdeeds, or reform. There was humor and realism and poetic justice involved, but Carling, and other criminals before him, were in no position to appreciate the fine touch. They were too close to it.

"Yes," Carling admitted cautiously. "I know about your studies in criminology. I knew it was your work in neuro-surgery which made possible some of the discoveries used in the conscience button. Naturally, I did not expect you to help me try to remove the button. But you must know more about its functions than anyone else. Since the operation, I've been so confused that I scarcely know who I am—let alone *what* I am. I thought you might explain my position to me, help me understand it."

Dr. Staples laughed shrewdly. "I doubt that. I doubt if you expected, or even hoped for, anything of the kind. Whatever I know about the button which is not already public information cannot be divulged. In any case, not to you. This is just a fishing expedition, and your only hope is that I might let something slip. Probably you want to return to your criminal activities. If so, I must warn you against it. Others like you have tried it, only to find reformation forced on them when they could no longer stand the pain."

"I can't reform if I don't know what I'm reforming from," Carling protested. "They must have set up some kind of hypnotic barriers to keep me from

remembering my old life. I wanted to revisit my old haunts, renew friendships, and do a lot of things when I got out. But I can't. Everything is blank. Oh, I have memories stretching way back, old snatches of events and experiences, but none recent, none since I came to Venus, and none at all dealing with crime. I'm not even sure that Carling is my real name."

"Mechanical hypnosis is frequently used in treatment of criminals. It makes it easier for them to begin a new life by erasing the old. Also, it makes it more difficult for them to pick up bad habits from the bad company they've kept. The court did you a favor—why not leave it like that?"

"I don't know. I suppose everyone has a compulsion to know himself, to understand who and what he is. Is it possible for a doctor or hypnomech to put a man back into deep trance and break through those barriers?"

"It's possible, but difficult and dangerous. Any good psychiatrist could probe your past. Mechanical hypnosis locks many doors, but there was never a door without a key. However, I doubt if any reputable psychiatrist would turn locksmith to help a criminal. Technically, he would become your accomplice in breaking the law."

"Is there a law against a doctor hypnotizing a patient to explore his past and learn what is wrong with him?" Carling asked.

"In your case, there is. You're a known, convicted criminal, obviously set upon returning to your former life of crime."

Carling laughed cynically. "You can't prove that and I don't think you'll try. I saw a lawyer first. According to the law, I'm no longer a criminal. I'm supposed to be incapable of crime. I'm a free agent, and the police are no longer interested in me. Or in anything I do."

Dr. Staples reached a decision. "I'm not going to help you, Carling."

"Not even to get a job?"

"Not in any way. I'm interested in criminals from the standpoint of my profession, not theirs. You're an incorrigible. You know it and I know it. I'm sorry for you, but that's all."

Carling stood up, hesitating. "I may be back."

"If you come here again, I'll feel it my duty to report your inquiries to the police. Then they'll start some of their own about you."

Carling shrugged. "So what? Let them earn their money. I've paid the penalty for my law-breaking. Since I got out, I haven't even dented a law. You can't prove I intend to, and if you could, the punishment is supposed to be inside my skull. If you are stupid enough to make a complaint, you'll make yourself ridiculous. If you don't trust the gadget, the public will lose faith in it quickly enough."

II

THE INAUDIBLE BUZZING WAS TORMENT IN Carling's head as he left the office. He must school himself against emotional upsets. On a fourth level moving walkway, he went across town, selecting an expressway for the emotional release of speed and the calming effect of air flowing over

him. His mind raced, but in a vacuum, with no resistance. Controlling his impulse to break the law was going to be difficult, but for the moment he had no choice. Soundless vibration in his head set every nerve and muscle on edge, making thinking difficult.

In search of refuge, he descended to the maze of surface alleyways and wandered at random. By instinct rather than memory, he knew where he was. The old native quarter—although all the natives who had once lived there had long since fled the encroachments of civilization. Oddly, the area seemed familiar, as if he had once spent much time here.

There were flashes of something like memory, but no details. Recalling a certain bar as one might recall a locale from a dream, Carling followed the twists and turns of the rat warren, exploring. It was a relief to find it in the precise location memory specified.

It was a refuge, a place where he could sit and think, and practice schooling his acquisitive urges. There was a lot to think about, and so little to go on.

Hypnotic barriers prevented him from remembering any part of his trial as an habitual criminal. He had tried to look it up in the newstape microfiles, but criminal activities were no longer played up in the news summaries. Unbalanced people were too prone to emulation. There had been only the most cursory reference to his arrest, trial and sentence.

It must have been only a formality anyhow. Hypnomechs obtained the required confession, and the rest was chiefly electronic diagnosis, punch card analysis, and a cyber bank judgment—all processing done with robotic impartiality and efficiency. Carling had been convicted, and conviction carried the mandatory sentence of OC, operative correction. So he had been removed from the prison to the hospital, treated, and released directly to face the world on his own. In theory at least, if not a changed man, he was no longer a menace to society. The trouble in his case was that the urge to steal remained too strong, in spite of his being paroled in custody of the mental button nestled against his brain.

Released, Carling tried as others had before him to drop out of sight. Using the stake of credits supplied by the Society of Reformed Criminals, which was supposed to help him get a new start, he moved around rapidly, covering his tracks, changing his name and address a dozen times, building a new identity, acquiring forged ID cards, having his fingerprints altered, getting eyeballs tattooed and making himself generally unrecognizable.

All that was expected, of course, so nobody bothered him in his routine. A marked man will naturally want to remove the markings, as a necessary preliminary to changing his way of life. There was nothing antisocial about trying to merge one's identity in the herd, so Carling's conscience did not disturb him. At a certain point, when the money began to run low, he became aware of a warning buzz, and as he began to grope desperately toward memory of his previous life, the irritation grew worse.

There was some satisfaction in knowing that he must have been a superior craftsman in whatever criminal line had brought his downfall, for no others rated the OC treatment. Any hypnotic barriers could only blur and not erase the habit patterns of a lifetime. Eventually, Carling knew, he could rediscover his special skills, but he was impatient, both because of lack of money and his inner compulsions. Of course, he could take a respectable job, as a cover for later ventures in crime, but it went against the grain somehow, as if he were failing to take up a challenge.

Carling sat in a booth and ordered, his voice picked up by hidden microphones. Servomechs produced drinks mixed to order, sealed in plastic containers and sent through pneumotubes, to appear as if by magic from an aperture in the table.

Carling sipped his drink slowly, trying to relax. If he could not recapture his memories consciously, the wisest course was simply to drift, letting his subconscious follow habit patterns he was quite sure would lead somewhere. He was waiting for something, although it wasn't at all clear in his mind what shape that elusive intangible would eventually take.

But when the girl slipped into the booth opposite him, he was not surprised. "Order me a drink," she said easily, "so it will look as if you had expected me. Or did you?"

"I must have, I think. Did I know you . . . before?"

She met his stare calmly, as if she was used to men's stares. She was the type, all right. Obviously not a girl to be working in a low class bar, and not a hustler. She was small, blonde, neatly dressed, with a faintly overdone air of respectability like any of a million workers in offices, stores, factories. Even her attractiveness was that of any healthy, well-bred, ordinary human female.

As an individual, she was just what any man would want in a casual companion, but in a crowd she would not stand out. But Carling was too old a hand not to realize that the best camouflage is to look too much like everyone else.

"Whether you knew me or not makes no difference," she said quickly. "You wouldn't remember—"

"That's true enough. Then you know about me?"

She nodded. Dipping into her bag, she brought out a set of two way scrambler mikes and earphones, often used in offices for private conversations between business men where hidden scanners might be operating. It was not too unusual to see dreamstruck lovers making use of the same device.

Carling laughed. "You came prepared."

"I never trust hidden microphones, not even those for ordering drinks in a dive like this. Don't worry. I hardly expect you to whisper sweet nothing to me on such short acquaintance. How much do you know about yourself?"

"Not as much as you do evidently. I know the name that's supposed to be mine. I gather that I'm supposed to have been a criminal. Can you fill in any details?"

She smiled, as if he had said some complimentary banality. "I could, but that's not important.

Your real name is unknown, even to the police. Carling is your best known alias. You were a criminal. A burglar, good or bad, depending on the point of view. You've been watched since your release. It hasn't been too easy, with you trying to drop out of sight. But someone always keeps track of new fish from the tank. It's much harder to hide from your friends than your enemies. Remember that."

"What do you want from me?"

Her laughter sparkled and chilled like ice shavings. There was cruelty and mockery in it, and a hint of unknown joy. Such a woman might be difficult to tame, but worth the trouble, Carling thought, feeling strangely attracted.

"That depends on what you want from us," she said. "And what you are willing to pay for the privilege of working again."

"If that's a question," Carling answered warily, "I think I'll dodge it for the moment. You could be a police spy."

"So could you. It's wise to be cautious when you're dealing with the unknown, but you have less to lose than we do. So it's up to you to convince me first. Then the group. If you want our help."

Carling plunged. "All right. I want to return to my work. But I have a conscience button in my head. Also, some hypnotic blocks. I imagine the blocks will break down in time. But can anything be done about the conscience button?"

She nodded. "Something can, with the proper drugs and conditioning. It's not complete, but it does damp down the effects. If you can meet our standards, there is a chance you will be accepted into our exclusive organization, working with us, and able to claim our help in various ways. But can you accept tight discipline, and are you willing to pay high dues? Fifty percent?"

Carling frowned. "I've always made a point of working alone. And fifty percent is high. I'd rather pay off once and be through with it. In criminal gangs, there are always weak links, and the possibility of betrayal."

"Not in our group," she said. "For one thing, there is the need for drugs, if one is to continue. And we are very careful about weak links. I said our membership is exclusive."

"I still would prefer one big payoff."

"With what? We know your circumstances. You have nothing to offer but your talents, and even those are almost useless in your present condition. No, if you are admitted, you are in for life. Once you have our secrets, you are far too dangerous to us to be left on your own."

"That doesn't leave me much choice, does it?"

"Not much. You need us. We don't need you, but under proper circumstances, we can use you. I should warn you that the initiation is quite strenuous, and if you fail in any way, you will be killed. Do you still want to go on?"

"I'm not sure. Not until I know more about your offer. You say your drugs damp down the effects of the button. But how much? I can stand a minor crime, perhaps, but I don't want to make a career of being a victim in a torture chamber. I'm not too worried about the initiation, whatever it is, but I

like to be sure of my prospects before I take a gamble on high stakes."

"You can be. Our system works well enough. We limit our take, but only to avoid drawing police attention. Still, we do very well for ourselves, and live with danger and excitement, which is important to us."

"I can understand that. I need the adventure of crime, as an addict needs drugs. That is more to me than the profits—but those also are necessary to a career. I'm convinced. How can I convince you, or your group?"

"That's not so easy," she replied soberly. "First, we check your records, even more thoroughly than the police have. Then we consider your case, to make sure you will fit into our organization. That could have been done before, but we never invest in a man until we are sure he wants to come to us."

"I don't quite believe that, but I'm certain I'll pass on my records. Then what?"

"Next, we make sure you actually have a conscience button. There have been police spies, some of them actually wearing dud buttons, which showed no X-rays as the real thing. However, they did not pass the real test. We arrange a real job, and assign our candidate his part in it. On probation, you'll carry a portable polygraph, which will record all your reactions while working with a functioning conscience. That shows quickly enough if the button is genuine. It's hard on the candidate, but a sure way of protecting ourselves. I hope you have a high pain threshold. You'll need it."

"Pretty drastic, isn't it?—even for initiation into a brotherhood of crime? But I guess you know I'm desperate enough to try it. What happens if I pass the test? And how soon can I take it?"

"If you pass, you'll be accepted. I don't know when or if you'll be called. That depends upon too many unknown factors. You may be tested in other ways. But don't call us. We'll make contact with you, if we're interested."

"Don't make me wait too long," warned Carling. "My money is low."

She smiled coldly. "That's your problem. Perhaps you'd better get a job to tide you over. Now say something to me in a low voice, anything. I'll act insulted and throw my drink in your face. You get up and stalk out angrily."

Carling let his eyes dwell admiringly on her. Beneath the ordinary exterior, she was a real stunner. Any man might lose his head over her. He was not quite playing a part.

"You're beautiful . . . and dangerous," he whispered into the scrambler mike. "Too bad you're not my type."

Even braced for it, he was shocked by the deluge of cold liquid. It did nothing for the throb in his head. Anger blazed up in him. For a moment, he was tempted to return the compliment by throwing his drink in her face. But caution prevailed. Just now he could not alienate her. But later on . . .

A plush daydream, with impulses, crashed through his mind, and the conscience button went to work with shrieking, stabbing torture.

OUTSIDE, CARLING SLOUCHED INTO a pool of denser shadows and waited for the girl to appear. She had warned him against taking the initiative, but he had no intention of obeying the warning.

Darkness between buildings swallowed him, and he crouched down, motionless, tensed, mouth opened slightly, listening and watching. Sometime in his unknown past, his body muscles and will had been schooled to patient waiting. It was possible that she might take a back way out, but hardly likely under the circumstances. She would not expect to be followed. Carling had no definite objective in mind, but any information gained about her might prove useful.

Several people came and went, but they were men, or elderly women. Then she moved from the shadowy doorway into the street. For half a breath, she hesitated, glancing quickly to left and right as if to make sure she was unobserved. Then she turned and strode off in the direction of the escalator stages to the walkways.

Shadowing her was not easy. Even by day, visibility is poor in the domed cities of Venus, and by night, especially in poorer quarters, very little illumination seeps to ground level from the dome lights. It was late, and the street was deserted, or nearly so. In crowds, a shadower can trail easily without his quarry ever becoming aware of him. But on empty streets, though it is easy to keep the pursued in sight, the pursuer is also vulnerable. Carling followed as closely as he dared, but had to risk losing track of her to avoid discovery.

At the escalator, she ascended to the third level walks. This was luck. If she had stayed at ground level, or summoned a robocab to take the vehicular runways, she could have lost him in minutes. On the bare moving walks, he could follow a full span behind and still keep her in view. Only at intersections where there were switchovers were pools of harsh glare from the radilumes. She went confidently, not looking back.

But she was no fool. With instinctive or habitual caution, she changed directions frequently. She moved from local walkways to the express runs and back. Twice she descended from the walkways to ground level and followed tortuous routes through the maze of streets and alleys. The game went on, a paper chase without a paper trail. Part of the time, Carling tried to trail her from a crossways a stage above the ground, but he could only approximate her movements.

As if he were an old hand at shadowing, though he could not remember it, he seemed to sense her evasions in advance, and was lucky in approximating her directions. To get anywhere, she would have to return to the moving walks, and it was only necessary to be there ahead of her and out of sight when she came up. Once she took a long time to reappear, and Carling was afraid he had lost her.

On her third descent, he decided to take no further chances, and closed in to follow as closely as he dared. It was fortunate he did. She seemed to disappear into the dark mouth of an alley almost at the foot of the escalator staging. If he

hadn't been close behind her, Carling wouldn't have had the least idea where she had gone.

Many doors fronted on the short alley. The girl had vanished, and it was impossible to know which building she had entered. Carling could only keep himself well hidden and await her reappearance. It was unlikely a girl like that would live in such an area, so probably she was making a report on her interview with him. To someone . . .

Carling was far more interested in that someone than in the girl. Patiently he waited, and his patience was rewarded. A door opened somewhere, evidenced only by sound. No block of light from within sprang across the dust-shrouded alley. The girl slipped from darkness within to dimness outside. By his trained, sensitive hearing, Carling followed her footsteps out of the alley.

Waiting to be certain she had really gone, Carling eventually left his place of concealment and studied the building. There was no light within, and the outside illumination was barely sufficient to show that the structure was in no way outstanding. For a city as new as Venusport, it seemed quite old and ramshackle. It had probably been built originally as a barrack for colonists, and later turned into a warren of offices and cheap living quarters. The street door was locked.

Carling steeled himself against a barrage of pain from his built-in conscience. For the first time since OC, he was about to break a law, and he knew he must pay the price. From hidden pockets of his suit, he got out a few simple tools, and a set of small rubber suction cups for hands and feet. Locating the emergency fire-chute, he squeezed into it and began a grimly determined ascent.

Even though he had not come to rob, breaking and entering illegally was a crime, and the metallic button in his head set off a shrill crescendo of inaudible vibration mixed with racking throbs of pain. Ignoring it, he inched steadily up the smooth, steeply inclined spiral. It was a wearisome task—even with know-how and assured skill, both of which he lacked consciously. But there was the satisfaction of rediscovering old habit-patterns and his muscles had not forgotten their training. He managed.

At each floor level was a trapdoor, spring-hung, which led into the hallway. But Carling knew the doors were wired to sound an alarm the instant they were opened from the chute side. Bracing himself, working with difficulty in his cramped quarters, Carling used the small tools to dig into the fireproof walls. He got at the wiring and bypassed the alarms, gleeful that he was regaining his lost skills. Burglar barriers keep out everyone but an experienced burglar, he reflected cynically. But with each obstacle that he overcame, he paid bitterly, the pain released by his mechanical conscience becoming almost unbearable by the time he reached the third floor.

Carling emerged on the third floor. As expected, the building was just a rat warren of small business offices, some with attached living quarters. He began cautious exploration. Fortunately many of the cubicles were unoccupied, since every business not on the precarious edge of disaster had

long ago drifted away from the area. He learned quickly that all of the upper floors were practically uninhabited.

Descending to the lower floors, he listened at door after door for the sound of any activity. The hallways were dimly lighted by fluorescent tiling, but after a moment his eyes adjusted to the dimness. It was better not to use his hand radilume until necessary.

Carling was about to go down to the ground floor when a light-code key flickered outside the street door, and someone entered. He had barely time to fling himself behind the curve of the ramp. It was the girl, returning. This was luck again, but he was not sure whether it was good or bad. At least now he would know where in the building she had gone. Carrying a number of odd-shaped parcels, she came up. Carling glided back down the hall, looking for a place of concealment. Trying several doors, he found one unlocked. It gave into darkness.

Footfalls came muffled through the door, but she seemed to be approaching his refuge. Bad luck. Swiftly and silently, he moved through the room, brushing furniture, groping along bare walls to find a door.

He found one after much fumbling. It swung open and he backed through, just as the girl entered. Through the crack of the closing door, he saw a momentary flash as she clicked on the wall switch. He backed across the dark room. Then suddenly the lights blazed all around him.

Dazzled, he looked swiftly about. Except for himself, the room was empty. It was bare even of furniture. And the light was terribly, blindingly bright. It seemed to seep through every cell of his body. A concealed speaker grated into sound.

"Yes, Carling. You are trapped. We were expecting you." It was a man's voice.

Carling said nothing. There was no use attempting a defense, no use trying to orient himself, or alert his senses to hidden danger. The next move was up to . . . someone.

"Evidently you have not lost the use of your burglar's talents. Though you took quite a while getting in."

"She knew I was following?"

"Of course. You were expected to. If she had wanted to lose you, she could have. Are you foolish enough to carry a weapon?"

"I never did. I don't now."

"Of course not. Good burglars rarely go armed. We are impressed by your ingenuity and initiative. The question remains, what are we going to do with you?"

"Haven't you already decided that?"

"Not quite. You were seen going to Dr. Staples office. Why? He's a member of the Crime Council, and has been known to work closely with the police. Why did you go to him?"

"It seemed logical that the man who worked out the original idea of a mechanical conscience would know more about it than anyone else. I thought I might learn something."

"Did you?"

Carling grunted unhappily. "Only that it can't be removed surgically, which I already suspected.

If it could, they wouldn't trust it as completely as they do."

"You were warned not to come here," continued the mechanically altered voice. "Why did you persist?"

"That too seemed logical. You have something I want—a way to beat the conscience button. I never buy anything if there's a chance of stealing it."

The voice chuckled flatly, metallically. "You have already broken our first rule—that of blind obedience to the rules. But then you are not actually a member of our organization, so the infraction will not count against you. Our secrets cannot be stolen. Are you willing now to pay the price?"

"I haven't much choice. I'll pay."

"Good. We're wasting time. A raid is planned for tonight. Nothing exactly in your line, but possibly we can use you. None of your associates will be known to you, but all are known, experienced criminals. All wear the conscience button, but for them the effect will be deadened. You can go along, on probation, without that help. As was explained to you, on his first assignment, the candidate must endure the torments of the button without help from us. And you will be fitted with a portable polygraph to record your reactions. Understood?"

"Understood and agreed. I don't like it, but I guess I can stand it one time. But what about next time? Do your gimmicks really work?"

"Within limits. You've heard of the zombie drugs?"

"Of course. The old tranquilizers, stepped up and mixed with narco-hypnotics. But aren't they—"

"Dangerous? Yes, in incompetent hands. Also, we use an additional processing. Actually, they insure that everyone on an assignment will do exactly as he is told. You won't be drugged. You will be a free agent. But at the first sign of weakness, failure or betrayal, your partner will have orders to kill you. In case you doubt that, remember she will be under the influence of the zombie drug."

"When do we start?" asked Carling tonelessly.

"Right now. Your partner will be waiting for you at the street door. She can explain the assignment as you go."

IV

THE PLAN WAS SIMPLE, direct, and ambitious. Its objective was the gem collection in the Venus State Museum. A timed smoke bomb had been placed in the ventilator intake shaft, and central fire alarm wiring diverted. At the proper moment two copter trucks camouflaged as fire equipment would descend into the courtyard of the museum building. It was expected that the staff and guards would throw open the building. If not, the raiders were prepared to cut through the walls with atomic torches, dispose of the guards with gas guns, and blast their way into the vault with explosives.

"Why do you need a burglar along?" asked Carling.

"You may be useful," the girl replied. "The vaults are protected by special alarms we could not put out of order in advance. That will be your job.

I don't suppose even a burglar of your talents can crack the time-lock on the vaults."

Excitement was building up in Carling. Now professional pride went up a notch, matched instantly by the screaming pain in his head.

"I can," he said quickly, "with an atomic drill. That is, I can unless this button cracks my head open first."

"It won't," she assured him. "Not on your first job, unless you plan to kill someone. The pain scale is graduated to the individual, and not meant to cause fatal damage at the first slip. My father—"

She caught herself midbreath, and changed the subject by staring around them at the rest of the group in the waiting copter truck. All of them looked oddly unconvincing in their firemen's suiting disguise. The girl most of all, in her ill-fitting armor, and the flesh-colored rubber face mask. But for her remembered voice, Carling would not have recognized her, though he would never have mistaken the small figure for a real fireman.

"You'll have your atomic drill, if we get in," she said wearily. "In the meantime, if you have any other helpful ideas, tell me. I can communicate constantly with the leader."

"I don't imagine he comes along on such large scale smash and grab raids as this," commented Carling cynically. "There'd be too much danger for a boss."

"He's in the other copter truck," she said acidly. "He always comes when there's a new candidate to be watched. If you try any tricks, and I fail or show weakness, he will burn you down before you can do us harm."

"I'm convinced," said Carling.

Hovering between the great city dome and the buildings below, the two simulated fire copters seemed detached from reality. Carling had the professional burglar's patience, but this time he waited apprehensively. Smash and grab was not his line, on any scale, and now he had two additional worries—two guns at his back, in the hands of unknown and probably drugged killers, and the pain from his mechanical conscience, slowly building to a sky-shattering headache.

He hoped grimly that he could endure the torment and live long enough to pass his test. For the time being, any thought of a future was submerged in troubles of the present. He was already in far beyond his depth, with no way of turning back, even if he wanted to. Physical and mental distress raged through him in storms.

Then an alarm sent a quiver of vibration through the copter truck. Blades flailing, the two vehicles headed down to the darkly clustered blocks of city buildings. A courtyard opened below, and they settled toward it rapidly. There was a bump and they were down, men spilling from the trucks like routed insects.

The museum was a glare of light, though no flames showed. Smoke billowed from the open front door. Guards issued from the smoke pall, urging the supposed firemen inside. Gas guns dealt with the guards as they emerged, choking, from the smoke, and limp forms littered the courtyard. Then the false firemen swarmed into the building,

trundling various loads of heavy equipment with them.

In the main salon of the museum building, they ran into trouble. Something had alerted the guards remaining inside. Beams from heat guns interlaced viciously. There were casualties on both sides. Men fell and lay writhing. Cases of artifacts from three early Venusian cultures glowed, flared and fused explosively. Gas guns immobilized the surviving knots of guards.

By previous order, the attackers quickly donned gas masks, part of regular fire-fighting equipment. Each team of raiders had a task assigned.

Under the gun of his partner, Carling put out of commission alarm systems as they went along, and soon the museum was cut off completely from the outside. It was sheer nightmare to Carling. Pain blared in his head, and he trembled with pressure and excitement, so that his skilled fingers fumbled the simplest of wiring complexes. He seemed to move drunkenly.

It was a literal inferno, with billowing clouds of smoke pierced by the flickering beams of flashlights. Gassed, half-conscious men lay on the floor, writhing and choking. Gangs of masked demons wove patterns of planned motion through the gloom and glare. And now real fire from the heat gun discharges licked hungrily at exhibits. Runnels of flame ran up and down priceless draperies of Venusk and brocades.

Carling felt like a hashish user, with time and space extending uneasily in various directions. At last, somehow, in the midst of general chaos, he and the girl stood before the massive door of the time-locked main vaults. An atomic drill was thrust into his hand. Grimly and purposefully he set to work.

A time-lock was no simple thing like a coded light-key pattern. This worked on a short-term half-life capsule of disintegrating atomic alloys. To break it down and open the lock, the capsule must be reached and dispersed. At best the operation was ticklish, and under ordinary circumstances nearly impossible, with the risk of violent explosion or lethal radiation at every step.

Head pains became a crackling, searing torment as he worked, but he persisted, enlarging the hole slowly until he could reach in and move the capsule with shielded pliers.

"Will it take much longer?" asked the girl tightly.

"It's done," Carling said, staggering back blindly, his hand clamped against his head. Pain rose now in a fearful spiral, blanking out thought, sensation, emotion.

He reeled away as the time lock began to function smoothly. There was a whirring and snapping sound within the mechanism, and the door released, to open at a touch. Carling was beyond caring. The girl led him back, while others of the group closed in, swung the massive door aside and began looting the vaults.

"You've done well," the girl whispered as she guided him to the main salon, where some of the gang stood lookout while the main group loaded their carts with the priceless haul of gems and antique jewelry. "He'll be very pleased with you."

"Will he?" asked Carling thickly. Just then, nothing else mattered but relief from his agonies.

"Get him to the copter," someone ordered. "We can't have a cripple in the way while we're loading. Tell the pilots to be ready. We'll come fast when we're done."

Carling felt himself being led, pushed, dragged, urged in stumbling, erratic passage. Through the outer door and down shallow steps into the courtyard he faltered, the girl murmuring encouragement, trying to support and help him. The raiders were beginning to move out from the museum now, but Carling was not aware of them, except as vague patterns of movement in the light-pierced murk. There were hoarse voices giving orders.

Then raw, savage violence seemed to burst out all at once, everywhere about him. It penetrated even the haze of pain inside his skull. There was heavy firing, loud shouting, the hiss of heat gun beams slashing the air.

A voice spoke in Carling's brain. "Down, Carling—down! Lie flat!"

Carling thought his imagination must be playing tricks on him, but the girl must have heard something too. Her gas mask and face mask had been pushed aside. Now her face itself was a twisted mask of hate and horror. Fear seemed to paralyze her. A crossfire of searchlight beams bathed her and Carling in impossible radiance.

Carling was dropping to lie flat, even as her gun came up. She had no chance to fire. A thin pencil of heat-beam swung down and touched her gun. She screamed, staring at her scorched fingers.

Her scream seemed to go on and on in Carling's mind, blending with the torrent of incredible pain as darkness washed over him in waves. Consciousness broke down, but the scream and the pain went echoing and re-echoing in a timeless, dimensionless immensity of space.

V

CARLING CAME BACK TO FUZZY consciousness in a hospital bed. There were bandages, and he seemed to be injured, but he felt no pain. He felt nothing at all.

Nurses called doctors who behaved as mysteriously as witch-doctors, asking and answering no questions, only grunting to show satisfaction with his progress. He drifted for an unknown period in a curiously sensationless state, not knowing what had happened, or what was going on. Not caring.

There came a time when he roused from an uneasy dozing to find that feeling had returned. He could sense the coolness of crisp fabric around his body. His nerves were aware of certain muscular discomforts. He could see and hear and feel and smell and taste and think again.

A man sat by his bed. He recognized the commissioner from stereo-news photographs, and wondered why so much trouble was being taken over a single, unimportant prisoner.

"They said you'd be coming round about now," the official told him. "In case you're interested, we captured all of them who were on the raid. Except for three who were killed outright. The rest of the gang have been rounded up since."

"Does it matter to me?"

The commissioner was thoughtful. "I guess we owe you an explanation. It will have to do until you're in shape to go back to the hypnomechs. I'll make it brief."

A picture formed in Carling's mind. A picture that had been etched into his memory, through all the confusion and pain of the raid and the disaster. A girl, raising a gun to kill him. Her lips silently forming the one word, 'Judas!' And the fear and hate and horror of her expression.

Carling squirmed uneasily, just thinking about it.

"Thanks to you, we got all of them," the commissioner said happily. "You made a very good Judas goat. You didn't exactly lead them to the killing pen, but you led us to them. The conscience button in your head was not the standard button. Among other things, it broadcast your location on a sub-radio frequency constantly. We knew just where you were all the time, and by its intensity, pretty much what you were doing."

"All right," Carling said. "You knew what I was doing, and I knew it. Very clever of you, I'll admit. But you don't have to be so civilized about everything. I know what I am—a convicted criminal, evidently incorrigible, since I was caught in the act, again, even with the button in my head. What happens to me now?"

The commissioner laughed grimly. "It must have been rough on you. Believing you were a criminal, and having that conscience button in your head, cutting loose with warnings and pain every time you did what you had to do. You're no criminal at all. Just a special agent brought here on loan from Earth to do a job for us. You had a year's intensive training, including conditioning from educator tapes. Then the hypnomechs put you in deep trance and convinced you that you were Carling, implanting post-hypnotic suggestion so you had to go on stealing. Also, your burglar's habit patterns, your technical knowledge, were all post-hypnotic commands."

"You mean I'm not Carling? I can't believe it."

"You will, when the hypnomechs get you back to normal, to your own identity. The real Carling, or whatever his real name may be, is still in prison. He'll be released now, after OC treatment, with a conscience button in his head."

The pseudo-Carling mulled the matter briefly. "I feel for him whoever he is. With a conscience button like mine, I'll bet he reforms."

"His button is not exactly like yours," explained the commissioner. "Yours was chiefly a concealed transmitter. All of the effects you felt were purely subjective, suggested to you by the hypnomechs. Under hypnotic command, a person feels real pain, though there is no actual source of pain."

"Whatever it is, it works—damnably."

"A lot of people have found that out. That was

Dr. Staples original suggestion. To put dud metallic buttons in the skulls of criminals, then plant the idea hypnotically that they would warn, punish with pain, or even kill if the subject returned to crime. They worked all right. A few criminals even killed themselves, by just believing hypnotically that they would be killed by the button."

"In that case, how did the gang's drugs work to cut down imaginary pain?"

"Just the fact that they believed drugs would work helped slightly. Then the gang's mastermind re-hypnotized his henchmen and partially removed the hypnotic command. He wanted them to feel some dependence on him, for the necessary drugs. And the zombie drugs reduced them to mere slaves, at his command. Yes, Dr. Staples was very clever. He was the gang's mastermind, and too clever for his own good. He and his daughter were leaders, planners, organizers—the rest of them poor deluded tools. Like other clever men, Staples was playing both ends against the middle."

"We've been worried about him for some time, but we could not prove anything. We did stop telling the Crime Council everything we knew though. And Staples got too greedy, both for profit and excitement. He had to go along sometimes, partly from a sadistic desire to watch the effect of the conscience button on a new recruit."

"I wondered about that at the time. But they gave me no chance to back out. The girl held a gun on me all the time I was in the museum. At least until I cracked up." The man who was not Carling hesitated, remembering. "I feel a little sorry for her. Was she Staples daughter?"

"She still is. They have burns, but nothing serious."

The man on the bed was frowning, puzzled. "What will you do with them, now that you've caught them? If they know the buttons are just hypnotic, the gadgets won't work, will they?"

"We don't know. You can tell us more about that after the hypnomechs try to remove the suggestion from your mind. I'd say offhand, that you'll probably have to lead a highly moral life for two or three months. Your button will disintegrate slowly and be absorbed in about that time. But until it's gone, I imagine you'd better control any antisocial impulses. Don't worry about Dr. Staples. The joke is on him. We have new buttons now that really work as specified. Staples and his daughter will both get OC, and they may be in for some painful surprises."

The man on the bed laughed harshly, then sobered. "I don't even know her name," he mused aloud. "But I'm wondering what it would be like to be married to a woman with a conscience."

"If you ask me, she could still be trouble," said the commissioner.

But the man who was not Carling was not listening.

DEPARTMENT of LOST STORIES



The inauguration of this department in our last issue resulted in a reader response so gratifying that a brief recapitulation of what we said originally—for the benefit of new readers—seems only orderly, appropriate and wise. So transitory is magazine publication alone (only 30 to 60 days on sale) that many of the truly great stories of the past become quickly lost and forgotten. So our aim will be to reprint SF and fantasy classics of the past in each issue.



CELL-MATE

by THEODORE STURGEON

No man ever had a stranger cellmate. In fact, he was far too strange for comfort—on any plane!

THEY SAY, "Ever been in jail?" and people laugh. People make jokes about jail. It's bad, being in jail. Particularly if you're in for something you didn't do. It's worse if you did do it; makes you feel like such a damn fool for getting caught. It's still worse if you have a cellmate like Crawley. Jail's a place for keeping cons out of the way a while. A guy isn't supposed to go nuts in one.

Crawley was his name and crawly he was. A middling-sized guy with a brown face. Spindly arms and legs. Stringy neck. But the biggest chest I ever did see on a man his size. I don't care what

kind of a shirt they put on him. The bigger it was, the farther the cuffs hung past his hands and the tighter it was over his chest. I never seen anything like it. He was the kind of a lookin' thing that stops traffic wherever he goes. Sort of a humpback with the hump in front.

I'm not in the cell two weeks when I get this freak for a jail buddy. I'm a lucky guy. I'm the kind of gent that slips and breaks his neck on the way up to collect a jackpot playing Screeno. I find hundred-dollar bills on the street and the man with the net scoops me up for passing counterfeits.

I get human spiders like Crawley for cellmates.

He talked like a man having his toenails pulled out. He breathed all the time so you could hear it. He made you wish he'd stop it. He made you feel like stopping it. He whistled.

Two guards brought him in. One guard was enough for most cons, but I guess that chest scared them. No telling what a man built like that might be able to do.

Matter of fact, he was so weak he couldn't lift a bar of soap even. Hadn't, anyway, from the looks of him. A man couldn't get that crummy in a nice clean jail like ours without leaving soap alone right from the time they deloused him when they booked him in. So I said, "What'samatter, bull? I ain't lonely," and the guard said, "Shut the face. This thing's got his rent paid in advance an' a reservation here," and he pushed the freak into the cell.

I said, "Upper bunk, friend," and turned my face to the wall. The guards went away and for a long time nothing happened.

After a while I heard him scratching himself. That was all right in itself, but I never heard a man scratch himself before so it echoed. I mean inside him. It was as if that huge chest was a box and sounding board. I rolled over and looked at him. He'd stripped off the shirt and was burrowing his fingers into his chest. As soon as he caught my eye he stopped, and in spite of his swarthy skin, I could see him blush.

"What the hell are you doing?" I asked. He grinned and shook his head. His teeth were very clean and strong. He looked very stupid. I said, "Cut it out, then."

It was about eight o'clock, and the radio in the area below the tiers of cell-blocks was blaring out a soap opera about a woman's trials and tribs with her second marriage. I didn't like it, but the guard did, so we heard it every night. You get used to things like that and after a week or so you begin to follow them. So I rolled out of the bunk and went to the gratings to listen. Crawley was a hulk over in the corner. He'd been here about twenty minutes now and still had nothing to say, which was all right with me.

The radio play dragged on and wound up as usual with another crisis in the life of the heroine, and who the hell really cared? But you'd tune in tomorrow night just to see if it would really be as dopey as you figured. Anyway, that was 8:45, and the lights would go out at nine. I moved back to my bunk, laid out a blanket, and began washing my face at the little sink by the door. At ten minutes to, I was ready to turn in, and Crawley still hadn't moved.

I said: "Figurin' to stay up all night?"

He started. "I—I—no, but I couldn't possibly get into that upper bunk."

I looked him over. His toothpick arms and legs looked too spindly to support a sparrow's weight, let alone that tremendous barrel of a chest. The chest looked powerful enough to push the rest of him through a twenty-foot wall. I just didn't know.

"You mean you can't climb up?"

He shook his head. So did I. I turned in. "What are you going to do? The guard'll look in in a minute. If you ain't in your bunk you'll get solitary.

I been there, fella. You wouldn't like it. All by yourself. Dark. Stinks. No radio, no one to talk to; no nothin'. Better try to get into that bunk." I turned over.

A minute later he said, without moving, "No use trying. I couldn't make it anyway."

Nothing happened until three minutes to nine when the lights blinked. I said "Hell!" and swung into the upper bunk, being careful to put my lucky bone elephant under the mattress first.

Without saying a word—and "thanks" was noticeably the word he didn't say—he got into the lower just as we heard footsteps of the guard coming along our deck. I went to sleep wondering why I ever did a thing like that for a homely looking thing like Crawley.

The bell in the morning didn't wake him, I had to. Sure, I should've let him sleep. What was he to me? Why not let the guard pitch ice-water on him and massage his feet with a night-stick? Well, that's me. Sucker. I broke a man's cheekbone once for kicking a cur-dog. The dog turned around and bit me afterwards. Anyway, I hopped out of my bunk—almost killed myself, forgot for a minute it was an upper—and, seeing Crawley lying there whistling away out of his lungs, I put out a hand to shake him. But the hand stopped cold. I saw something.

His chest was open a little. No, not cut. Open, like it was hinged—open like a clam in a fish market. Like a clam, too, it closed while I watched, a little more with each breath he took. I saw a man pulled out of the river one time in the fall. He'd drowned in the summer. That was awful. This was worse. I was shaking all over. I was sweating. I wiped my upper lip with my wrist and moved down and grabbed his feet and twisted them so he rolled off the bunk and fell on the floor.

He squeaked and I said, "Hear that bell? That means you're through sleeping, remember?"

Then I went and stuck my head under the faucet. That made me feel better. I saw I'd been afraid of this Crawley feller for a minute. I was just sore now. I just didn't like him.

He got up off the floor very slowly, working hard to get his feet under him. He always moved like that—like a man with nothing in his stomach and two hundred pounds on his back. He had to sort of coil his legs under him and then hand-over-hand up the bunk supports. He was weak as a duck. He wheezed for a minute and then sat down to put on his pants. A man has to be sick or lazy to do that. I stood drying my face and looking at him through the rag towel.

"You sick?" I asked. He looked up and said no.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I told you that last night. What do you care, anyway?"

"Mind your mouth, cellmate. They used to call me Killer back home. I tore a guy's arm off one time and beat him over the head with the bloody end of it. He was a little freak like you. He didn't excuse himself when he walked in front of me."

Crawley took all this noise calmly enough. He just sat there looking up at me with his muddy eyes and didn't say anything. It made me sore. I said, "I don't think I like you. See that crack in

the floor? That one there. You stay on this side of it. Cross that line and I pop you. See?"

Now that was a dirty trick, the running water was on "my" side of the line, and so was the cell door, where he'd have to go to get his eats. So was the bunk. He got up off the bunk clumsy-like, and crossed over to the window and stood with his back to it, looking at me. He didn't look scared and he didn't look sore and he didn't look sorry. He just watched me, obedient like a hound-dog.

I snorted and turned my back to him, grasping the grating, waiting for chow. Prison rules were that if a man didn't want to eat he didn't have to. If he didn't want to eat he wouldn't show up at the grating when the mess wagon came along his deck. If he was sick, there was a sick-call at ten o'clock. That was none of the trusty's business, the guy who pushed the wagon. He fed whoever was reaching through the bars with his square messkit and his tin cup and spoon.

So I hung out there, and Crawley was backed up against the other wall and I could feel his eyes on my back. My mind was clicking right along. Funny, though. Like—well, like this:

"I oughta get paid for having to bunk with a sideshow. By God, I will get paid, too. I got two messkits, his and mine. I can feel them eyes. Here's one time I get four prunes and four pieces of bread and by golly enough prune-juice to really sweeten that lousy coffee.

"Hot dam—tomorrow's Wednesday. Two eggs instead of one. I'll starve the—until he gets so weak an' sick they'll ship him out of here. Oh, boy—wait'll Sunday! Wait'll that misshapen cockroach has to watch me eatin' two lumps of ice cream! An' if he squeals I'll break his neck an' stuff it under his belt. I can feel—two sets of eyes!"

The wagon came. I stuck out one kit. A spoon of oatmeal and a dribble of watered, canned milk in one side, two prunes and juice in the other. Coffee in the cup. Two hunks of bread on the cup. I quickly stuck out the other kit. The trusty didn't even look. He filled up again and moved on.

I backed away with a kit in each fist. I was afraid to turn around. There was one guy behind me and I could feel two pairs of eyes on my back. I spilled a couple of drops of coffee from my left hand and saw I was shaking. I stood there like a damn fool because I was afraid to turn around.

I said to myself, what the hell, he could not pull his finger out of a tub of lard and he's got you on the run. Put down the grub and walk on him. If you don't like his eyes, close 'em. Close all—I gulped—four of them.

Aw, this was silly. I went over to him and said, "Here," and gave him his messkit. I spooned a little oatmeal into his dish. I told him to go and sit on his bunk and eat. I showed him how to sweeten his coffee with prune-juice. I don't know why I did it. I don't know why I never reminded him again about the line. He didn't even say thanks.

I ate and washed my kit before he was half through. He chewed enough for two people. I guess I knew from the start that there was more to him than just one guy. When he was done he sat there looking at me again. He put his kit on the floor

beside him and then went and stood by the window. I was going to say something to him about it, but I figured I'd let him be.

It was raining, gloomy outside. That was lousy. On a clear day they let us in the yard for an hour in the afternoon. Rainy days we had a half-hour in the area under the cell-blocks. If you had money you could get candy and smokes and magazines. If you didn't have money you did without. I still had twenty cents. I was rolling my own, stretching it. Wasn't nobody going to bring me cash money. I was doing a little sixty-day stretch for something that doesn't matter much, and if I watched it I could keep smoking until I was done here.

Well, anyway, on rainy days there's not much to do. You make your bunk. If you have a break, you can usually drag up something interesting to talk about with your cellmate. As long as your cell is halfway clean looking, it's okay, but they're all scrubbed bone-white and chrome-shiny because that's all there is to do.

After I'd sat for an hour and a half smoking more than I could afford and trying to find something new to think about, I grabbed the bucket and brush and began to polish the floor. I made up my mind to do just half of it. That was a bright idea. When the guards came around inspecting for dirty cells at ten-thirty, one-half of this one would look crummy because the other half would be really scrubbed. That and Crawley's dirty messkit would get him into a nice jam. The guards knew by this time how I kept my cell.

Feeling almost happy at the idea, I turned to and began wearing out my knees and knuckles. I really bore down. When I came to the middle of the cell I went back and started over. I worked right up to Crawley's messkit. I stopped there. I picked it up and washed it and put it away. Crawley moved over to the clean half. I finished washing the floor. It certainly looked swell. All over. Don't ask me why.

I put the gear away and sat down for awhile. I tried to kid myself that I felt good because I'd shown that lazy monstrosity up. Then I realized I didn't feel good at all. What was he doing; pushing me around? I looked up and glared at him. He didn't say anything. I went on sitting. Hell with him. This was the pay-off. Why, I wouldn't even talk to him. Let him sit there and rot, the worthless accident.

After a while I said, "What's the rap?"

He looked up at me inquiringly.

"What are you in for?" I asked again.

"Vag."

"No visible means of support, or no address?"

"Visible."

"What'd the man in black soak you?"

"I ain't seen him. I don't know how much it's good for."

"Oh! Waiting trial, huh?"

"Yeah. Friday noon. I got to get out of here before that."

I laughed. "Got a lawyer?"

He shook his head.

"Listen," I told him, "you're not in here on somebody's complaint, you know. The county put you here and the county'll prosecute. They won't

retract the charge to spring you. What's your bail?"

"Three hundred."

"Have you got it?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"Can you get it?"

"Not a chance."

"An' you got to get out of here."

"I will."

"Not before Friday."

"Uh-huh. Before Friday. Tomorrow. Stick around; you'll see."

I looked at him, his toothpick arms and legs. "Nobody ever broke this jail and it's forty-two years old. I'm six foot three an' two-twenty soaking wet, an' I wouldn't try it. What chance you got?"

He said again, "Stick around."

I sat and thought about that for a while. I could hardly believe it. The man couldn't lift his own weight off the floor. He had no more punch than a bedbug, and a lot less courage. And he was going to break this jail, with its twelve-foot walls and its case-hardened steel bars! Sure, I'd stick around.

"You're as dumb as you look," I said, "In the first place, it's dumb to even dream about cracking this bastille. In the second place, it's dumb not to wait for your trial, take your rap—it won't be more than sixty—and then get out of here clean."

"You're wrong," he said. There was an urgency about his strange, groaning voice. "I'm waiting trial. They haven't mugged me or printed me or given me an examination. If they convict me—and they will if I ever go to court—they'll give me a physical. Any doc—even a prison doc—would give his eyeteeth to X-ray me." He tapped his monstrous chest. "I'll never get away from them if they see the plates."

"What's your trouble?"

"It's no trouble. It's the way I am."

"How are you?"

"Fine. How are you?"

Okay, so it was none of my business. I shut up. But I was astonished at that long spiel of his. I hadn't known he could talk that much.

Lunch came and went, and he got his share and, in spite of myself, a little more. Nothing much was said; Crawley just didn't seem to be interested in anything that went on around him. You'd think a guy whose trial is coming up would worry about it. You'd think a guy who was planning a jail-break would worry about it. Not Crawley. He just sat and waited for the time to come. Damn if I didn't do all his fretting for him!

At two o'clock the bolts shot back. I said, "Come on, Crawley. We got a chance to stretch our legs in the area. If you got any money you can buy something to read or smoke."

Crawley said, "I'm okay here. Besides, I got no money. They sell candy?"

"Yeah."

"You got money?"

"Yep. Twenty cents. Tobacco for me for another two weeks at the rate of two or three home-made cigarettes per day. There ain't one penny for anyone or anything else."

"Hell with that. Bring back four candy bars. Two marshmallow, one coconut, one fudge."

I laughed in his face and went out, thinking

that there was one time when I'd have a story to tell the rest of the boys that would keep a lifer laughing. But somehow I never did get a chance to say anything to anybody about Crawley. I couldn't tell you how it happened. I started to talk to one fellow and the guard called him over. I said howdy to another and he told me to dry up, he had some blues he wanted to soak in.

Once I really thought I had a start—one of the stoolies, this time. But just as I said, "Hey, you ought to get a load of my cellmate," the bell rang for us to get back in the cells. I just had time to get to the prison store before the shutter banged down over the counter. I went back up to my deck and into my cell. I pitched Crawley his candy bars. He took them without saying thanks.

Hardly a word passed between us until long after supper. He wanted to know how to fix one blanket so it felt like two. I showed him. Then I hopped into the upper bunk and said, "Try sleepin' tonight."

He said, "What's the matter with you?"

"You was talking in your sleep last night."

"I wasn't talking to myself," he said defensively.

"You sure wasn't talking to me."

"I was talking to—my brother," said Crawley, and he laughed. My God, what a laugh that was. It was sort of dragged out of him, and it was grating and high-pitched and muffled and it went on.

I looked over the edge of the bunk, thinking maybe he wasn't laughing, maybe he was having a fit. His face was strained, his eyes were screwed shut. All right, but his mouth was shut. His lips were clamped tight together. His mouth was shut and he went on laughing!

He was laughing from inside somewhere, from his chest, some way I never even heard of before. I couldn't stand it. If that laughing didn't stop right away I'd have to stop breathing. My heart would stop breathing. My life was squirting out through my pores, turning to sweat. The laughter went higher and higher, just as loud, just as shrill, and I knew I could hear it and Crawley could, but no one else.

It went up and up until I stopped hearing it, but even then I knew it was still going on and up, and though I couldn't hear it any more, I knew when it stopped. My back teeth ached from the way my jaws had driven them into the gums. I think I passed out, and then slept afterwards. I don't remember the lights going out at nine, or the guards checking up.

I been slugged before, many a time, and I know what it's like to come to after being knocked out. But when I came out of this it was more like waking up, so I must have slept. Anyway, it wasn't morning. Must have been about three or four, before the sun came up. There was a weak moon hanging around outside the old walls, poking a gray finger in at us, me and Crawley. I didn't move for a few minutes, and I heard Crawley talking. And I heard someone else answering.

Crawley was saying something about money. "We got to get money, Bub. This is a hell of a jam. We thought we didn't need it. We could get anything we wanted without it. See what happened? Just because I'm no beauty winner a cop

asks us questions. They stick us in here. Now we've got to break out. Oh, we can do it; but if we get some money it don't have to happen again. You can figure something, can't you, Bub?"

And then came the answering voice. It was the grating one that had been laughing before. That wasn't Crawley's voice! That belonged to somebody else. Aw, that was foolish. Two men to a cell. One man to a bunk. But here were two men talking, and I *wasn't saying anything*.

I suddenly had a feeling my brains were bubbling like an egg frying in too much grease.

The voice shrielled, "Oh, sure. Money's no trouble to get. Not the way we work, Crawley! He he!" They laughed together. My blood felt so cold I was afraid to move in case my veins broke. The voice went on, "About this break; you know just what we're going to do?"

"Yeh," said Crawley. "Gee, Bub, I'd sure be wuthless without you. Man, what a brain, what a brain!"

The voice said, "You don't have to do without me! Heh! Just you try and get rid of me!"

I took a deep, quiet breath and slowly raised up and hung my head over the edge of the bunk so I could see. I couldn't be scared any more. I couldn't be shocked any more. After seeing that, I was through. A guy lives all his life for a certain moment. Like that little old doc that delivered the quints quite a while ago. He never did anything like it before. He never will again. From then on he was through. Like a detective in a book solving a crime. It all leads up to one thing—who done it. When the dick finds that out, he's through. The book's finished. Like me; I was finished when I was Crawley's brother. That was the high point.

Yeah, it was his brother. Crawley was twins. Like them Siamese twins, but one was big and the other was small. Like a baby. There was only the top part of him, and he was growing out of Crawley's chest. But that oversize chest was just built for the little one to hide in. It folded around the little one. It was hinged like I said before, something like a clamshell. My God!

I said it was like a baby. I meant just small like that. It wasn't baby stuff, aside from that. The head was shaggy, tight-curved. The face was long and lean with smooth, heavy eyebrows. The skin was very dark, and there was little crooked fangs on each side of the mouth, two up, two down. The ears were just a little pointed. That thing was all Crawley's crime-brains.

Crawley was just a smart mule to that thing. He carried it around with him and he did what it wanted him to do. Crawley obeyed that brother of his—and so did everybody else! I did. My tobacco money; cleaning the cell; seeing that Crawley got fed—that was all the little twin's doing, all of it. It wasn't my fault. Nobody ever pushed me around like that before!

Then it saw me. It had thrown its hideous little head back to laugh, and it flung up a withered little arm and piped. "You! Go to sleep! Now!"

So—I did.

I don't know how it happened. If I'd slept all that time the bulls would have taken me to the ward. But so help me, from that time until two

o'clock I don't know what happened. The Crawley twins kept me fogged, I guess. But I must have gotten dressed and washed; I must have eaten, and I'll guarantee that the Crawleys didn't wash no mess-kits.

Anyhow, the next thing I remember is the bolt shooting back on the cell door. Crawley came up behind me as I stood there looking at it, and I felt his eyes on my back. Four eyes.

"Go on," he said. "What are you waiting for?" "You've done something to me," I said. "What is it?"

He just said, "Get going."

We walked out together, out along the deck and down two long flights of iron stairs to the area. We took maybe fifteen, maybe twenty steps, and then Crawley whispered, "Now!"

I was loaded with H. E. I was primed and capped, and the firing pin of his voice stung me. I went off like that. There were two guards in front of me. I took them by their necks and cracked their heads together so powerfully that their skulls seemed soft. I screamed and turned and bounded up the stairs, laughing and shouting. Prisoners scattered. A guard grabbed at me on the first landing. I picked him up and threw him over my shoulder and ran upward.

A gun blammed twice, and each bullet went thuck! as it bored into the body of the bull I carried. He snatched at the railing as I ran and I heard the bones in his wrist crackle. I pitched him over the rail and he landed on another guard down there in the area. The other guard was drawing a bead on me and when the body struck him his gun went off. The slug ricocheted from the steps and flew into the mouth of a prisoner on the second deck. I was screaming much louder than he was.

I reached the third deck and ran around the cell-block chattering and giggling. I slid to a stop and threw my legs over the railing and sat there swinging my feet. Two cops opened fire on me. Their aim was lousy because only three out of the twelve bullets hit me. I stood on the lower rail and leaned my calves against the upper one and spread out my arms and shouted at them, cursing them with my mouth full of blood.

The prisoners were being herded six and eight to a cell, down on the area level. The guards in the area suddenly stood aside, making way like courtiers for the royalty of a man with a submachine gun. The gun began singing to me. It was a serenade to a giant on a balcony, by a grizzled troubadour with a deep-toned instrument. I couldn't resist that music for more than a moment, so I came down to the area turning over and over in the air, laughing and coughing and sobbing as I fell.

You watched me, didn't you, you flat-footed blockheads? You got out your guns and ran from the doors, from the series of searching rooms, booking rooms, desk rooms, bull-pens? You left the doors open when you ran? Crawley's out in the street now. No hurry for Crawley. Crawley gives the orders wherever he is. There'll be others—like me.

I've done work for Crawley. See me now? And—Crawley didn't even say, "Thanks."

by RAY BRADBURY

The Handler



There is a darkly monstrous evil in the worst of men which timid folk should avoid. But for you, bold reader, here's a Bradbury gem!

MR. BENEDICT CAME OUT of his little house. He stood on the porch, painfully shy of the sun and inferior to people. A little dog trotted by with clever eyes; so clever that Mr. Benedict could not meet its gaze. A small child peered through the wrought-iron gate around the graveyard, near the church, and Mr. Benedict winced at the pale, penetrant curiosity of the child.

"You're the funeral man," said the child.

Cringing within himself, Mr. Benedict did not speak.

"You own the church?" asked the child, finally.

"Yes," said Mr. Benedict bewilderedly.

"And the yards and the stones and the graves?" wondered the child.

"Yes," said Benedict, with some show of pride. And it was true. An amazing thing it was. A stroke of business luck really, that had kept him busy and humming nights over long years. First he had landed the church and the churchyard, with a few green-mossed tombs, when the Baptist people moved uptown. Then he had built himself a fine little mortuary, in Gothic style, of course, and covered it with ivy, and then added a small house for himself, way in back.

It was very convenient to die for Mr. Benedict.

He handled you in and out of buildings with a minimum of confusion and a maximum of synthetic benediction. *No need of a funeral procession!* declared his large ads in the morning paper. Out of the church and into the earth, slick as a whistle. Nothing but the finest preservatives used!

The child continued to stare at him and he felt like a candle blown out in the wind. He was so inferior. Anything that lived or moved made him feel apologetic and melancholy. He was continually agreeing with people, never daring to argue or shout or say no.

Whoever you might be, if Mr. Benedict met you on the street he would look up your nostrils or perceive your ears or examine your hairline with his little shy, wild eyes and never look you straight in your eye, and he would hold your hand between his cold ones as if your hand was a precious gift, as he said to you: "You are definitely, irrevocably, believably correct."

But, always, when you talked to him, you felt he never heard a word you said.

Now, he stood on his porch and said, "You are a sweet little child," to the little staring child, in fear that the child might not like him.

Mr. Benedict walked down the steps and out the gate, without once looking at his little mortuary building. He saved that *Pleasure* for later. It was very important that things took the right precedence. It wouldn't pay to think with joy of the bodies awaiting his talents in the mortuary building. No, it was better to follow his usual day-after-day routine. He would let the conflict begin.

He knew just where to go to get himself enraged. Half of the day he spent traveling from place to place in the little town, letting the superiority of the living neighbors overwhelm him, letting his own inferiority dissolve him, bathe him in perspiration, tie his heart and brain into trembling knots.

He spoke with Mr. Rodgers, the druggist, idle, senseless morning talk. And he saved and put away all the little slurs and intonations and insults that Mr. Rodgers sent his way. Mr. Rodgers always had some terrible thing to say about a man in the funeral profession.

"Ha, ha," laughed Mr. Benedict at the latest joke upon himself and he wanted to cry with miserable violence.

"There you are, you cold one," said Mr. Rodgers on this particular morning.

"Cold one," said Mr. Benedict, "ha, ha!"

Outside the drugstore, Mr. Benedict met up with Mr. Stuyvesant, the contractor. Mr. Stuyvesant looked at his watch to estimate just how much time he dared waste on Benedict before trumping up some appointment.

"Oh, hello, Benedict," shouted Stuyvesant. "How's business? I bet you're going at it tooth and nail. Did you get it? I said, I bet you're going at it tooth and . . ."

"Yes, yes," chuckled Mr. Benedict vaguely. "And how is your business, Mr. Stuyvesant?"

"Say, how do your hands get so cold, Benny, old man? That's a cold shake you got there. You just get done embalming a frigid woman! Hey, that's not bad. You heard what I said?" roared Mr.

Stuyvesant, pounding him vigorously on the back.

"Good, good!" cried Mr. Benedict, with a fleshless smile. "Good day."

On it went, person after person. Mr. Benedict, pummeled on from one to the next, was the lake into which all refuse was thrown. People began with little pebbles and then when Mr. Benedict did not ripple or protest, they heaved a stone, a brick, a boulder. There was no bottom to Mr. Benedict, no splash and no settling. The lake did not answer.

As the day passed he became more helpless and enraged with them, and he walked from building to building and had more little meetings and conversations and hated himself with a very real, masochistic pleasure. But the thing that kept him going most of all was the thought of the night pleasures to come. So he inflicted himself again and again with these stupid, pompous bullies and bowed to them and held his hands like little biscuits before his stomach, and asked no more than to be sneered at.

"There you are, meat-chopper," said Mr. Flinger, the delicatessen man. "How are all your corned beeves and pickled brains?"

Things worked to a crescendo of inferiority. With a final kettle-drumming of insult and terrible self-effacement, Mr. Benedict, seeking wildly the correct time from his wrist-watch, turned and ran back through the town.

He was at his peak, he was all ready now, ready to work, ready to do what must be done, and enjoy himself. The awful part of the day was over, the good part was now to begin!

He ran eagerly up the steps to his mortuary.

The room waited like a fall of snow. There were white hummocks and pale delineations of things recumbent under sheets in the dimness.

The door burst open.

Mr. Benedict, framed in a flow of light, stood in the door, head back, one hand upraised in dramatic salute, the other hand upon the door-knob in unnatural rigidity.

He was the puppet-master come home.

He stood a long minute in the very center of his theatre. In his head applause, perhaps, thundered. He did not move, but lowered his head in abject appreciation of this kind, applauding audience.

He carefully removed his coat, hung it up, got himself into a fresh white smock, buttoned the cuffs with professional crispness, then washed his hands together as he looked around at his very good friends.

It had been a fine week; there were any number of family relics lying under the sheets, and as Mr. Benedict stood before them he felt himself grow and grow and tower and stretch over them.

"Like Alice!" he cried to himself in surprise. "Taller, taller. Curiouser and curiouser!" He flexed his hands straight out and up.

He had never gotten over his initial incredulity when in the room with the dead. He was both delighted and bewildered to discover that there he was master of peoples, here he might do what he wished with men, and they must, by necessity, be polite and cooperative with him. They could not run away.

And now, as on other days, he felt himself released and resilient, growing, growing like Alice. "Oh, so tall, oh, so tall, so very tall . . . until my head . . . bumps . . . the ceiling."

He walked about among the sheeted people. He felt the same way he did when coming from a picture show late at night, very strong, very alert, very certain of himself. He felt that everyone was watching him as he left a picture show, and that he was very handsome and very correct and brave and all the things that the picture hero was, his voice oh, so resonant, persuasive and he had the right tilt to his left eyebrow and the right tap with his cane.

Sometimes this movie-induced hypnosis lasted all the way home and persisted into sleep. Those were the only two times in his living he felt miraculous and fine, at the picture show, or here—in his own little theatre of the cold.

He walked along the sleeping rows, noting each name on its white card.

"Mrs. Walters, Mr. Smith, Miss Brown, Mr. Andrews. Ah, good afternoon, one and all!"

"How are you today, Mrs. Shellmund?" he wanted to know, lifting a sheet as if looking for a child under a bed. "You're looking splendid, dear lady."

Mrs. Shellmund had never spoken to him in her life; she'd always gone by like a large, white statue with roller skates hidden under her skirts, which gave her an elegant, gliding, imperturbable rush.

"My dear Mrs. Shellmund," he said, pulling up a chair and regarding her through a magnifying glass. "Do you realize, my lady, that you have a sebaceous condition of the pores? You were quite waxen in life. Pore trouble. Oil and grease and pimples. A rich, rich diet, Mrs. Shellmund, there was your trouble. Too many frosties and sponge cakes and cream candies. You always prided yourself on your brain, Mrs. Shellmund, and thought I was like a dime under your toe, like a penny, really. But you kept that wonderful, priceless brain of yours afloat in parfaits and fizzes and limeades and sodas and were so very superior to me that now, Mrs. Shellmund, here is what shall happen . . ."

He did a neat operation on her. Cutting the scalp in a circle, he lifted it off, then lifted out the brain. Then he prepared a cake-confectioner's little sugar-bellows and squirted her empty head full of little whipped cream and crystal ribbons, stars and frolops, in pink, white and green, and on top he printed in a fine pink scroll, SWEET DREAMS, and put the skull back on and sewed it in place and hid the marks with wax and powder.

"So there!" he said, finished.

He walked on to the next table.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Wren. Good afternoon. And how is the master of the racial hatreds today, Mr. Wren? Pure, white, laundered Mr. Wren. Clean as snow, white as linen, Mr. Wren, you are. The man who hated Jews and Negroes, minorities, Mr. Wren, minorities."

He pulled back the sheet. Mr. Wren stared up with glassy, cold eyes. "Mr. Wren, look upon a member of a minority. Myself. The minority of inferiors, those who speak not above a whisper, those

afraid of talking aloud, those frightened little non-entities, mice. Do you know what I am going to do with you, Mr. Wren? First, let us draw your blood from you, intolerant friend."

The blood was drawn off.

"Now—the injection of, you might say, embalming fluid."

Mr. Wren, snow-white, lincn-pure, lay with the fluid going in him.

Mr. Benedict laughed.

Mr. Wren turned black; black as dirt, black as night.

The embalming fluid was—in.

"And hello to you Edmund Worth!" What a handsome body Worth had! Powerful, with muscles pinned from huge bone to huge bone, and a chest like a boulder. Women had grown speechless when he walked by, men had stared with envy and hoped they might borrow that body some night and ride home in it to the wife and give her a nice surprise. But Worth's body had always been his own, and he had applied it to those tasks and pleasures which made him a conversational topic among all peoples who enjoyed sin.

"And now, here you are," said Mr. Benedict, looking down at the fine body with pleasure. For a moment he was lost in memory of his own body in his own past.

He had once tried strangling himself with one of those apparati you nail in a doorway and chuck under your jawbone and pull yourself up on, hoping to add an inch to his ridiculously short frame. To counteract his deadly pale skin he had lain in the sun, but he boiled and his skin fell off in pink leaflets, leaving only more pink, moist, sensitive skin. And what could he do about the eyes from which his mind peered?—those close-set, glassy little eyes and the tiny wounded mouth.

You can repaint houses, burn trash, move from the slum, shoot your mother, buy new clothes, get a car, make money, change all those outer environments for something new. But what's the brain to do when caught like cheese in the throat of a mouse? His own environment thus betrayed him; his own skin, body, color, voice gave him no chance to extend out into that vast, bright world where people tickled ladies' chins and kissed their mouths and shook hands with friends and traded aromatic cigars.

Thinking in this fashion, Mr. Benedict stood over the magnificent body of Edmund Worth.

He severed Worth's head, put it in a coffin on a small, satin pillow, facing up, then he placed one hundred and ninety pounds of bricks in the coffin and arranged some pillows inside a black coat and a white shirt and tie to look like the upper body, and covered the whole with a blanket of blue velvet, up to the chin. It was a fine illusion.

The body itself he placed in a refrigerating vault.

"When I die, I shall leave specific orders, Mr. Worth, that my head be severed and buried, joined to your body. By that time I will have acquired an assistant willing to perform such a rascally act, for money. If one cannot have a body worthy of love in life, one can at least gain such a body in death. Thank you."

He slammed the lid on Edmund Worth.

Since it was a growing and popular habit in the town for people to be buried with the coffin lids closed over them during the service, this gave Mr. Benedict great opportunities to vent his repressions on his hapless guests. Some he locked in their boxes upside down, some face down, or making undignified gestures.

He had the most utterly wondrous fun with a group of old maiden ladies who were mashed in an auto on their way to an afternoon tea. They were famous gossips, always with heads together over some choice bit. What the onlookers at the triple funeral did not know—all three casket lids were shut—was that, as in life, all three were crowded into one casket, heads together in eternal, cold, petrified gossip. The other two caskets were filled with pebbles and shells and ravels of gingham.

It was a nice service. Everybody cried. "Those three inseparables, at last separated." Everybody sobbed.

"Yes," said Mr. Benedict, having to hide his face in his grief.

Not lacking for a sense of justice, Mr. Benedict buried one rich man stark naked. A poor man he buried wound in gold cloth, with five-dollar gold pieces for buttons and twenty-dollar coins on each eyelid. A lawyer he did not bury at all, but burnt him in the incinerator. His coffin contained nothing but a pole-cat, trapped in the woods one Sunday.

An old maid, at her service one afternoon, was the victim of a terrible device. Under the silken comforter, parts of an old man had been buried with her. There she lay, insulted by cold organs, being made cold love to by hidden hands. The shock showed on her face, somewhat.

So Mr. Benedict moved from body to body in his mortuary that afternoon, talking to all the sheeted figures, telling them his every secret. The final body for the day was the body of Merriwell Blythe, an ancient man afflicted with spells and comas. Mr. Blythe had been brought in for dead several times, but each time had revived in time to prevent premature burial.

Mr. Benedict pulled back the sheet from Mr. Blythe's face.

Mr. Merriwell Blythe fluttered his eyes.

"Ah!" and Mr. Benedict let fall the sheet.

"You!" screamed the voice under the sheet.

Mr. Benedict fell against the slab, suddenly shaken and sick.

"Get me up from here!" cried the voice of Mr. Merriwell Blythe.

"You're alive!" said Mr. Benedict, jerking aside the sheet.

"Oh, the things I've heard, the things I've listened to the last hour!" wailed the old man on the slab, rolling his eyes about in his head in white orbits. "Lying here, not able to move, and hearing you talk the things you talk! Oh, you dark, dark thing, you awful thing, you fiend, you monster, get me up from here. I'll tell the mayor and the council and everyone; oh you dark, dark thing! You defiler and sadist, you perverted scoundrel, you terrible man, wait'll I tell, I tell on you!"

shrieked the old man, frothing. "Get me up from here!"

"No!" cried Mr. Benedict, falling to his knees.

"Oh, you terrible man!" sobbed Mr. Merriwell Blythe. "To think this has gone on in our town all these years and we never knew the things you did to people! Oh, you monstrous monster!"

"No," whispered Mr. Benedict, trying to get up, falling down, palsied and in terror.

"The things you said," accused the old man in dry contempt. "The things you do!"

"Sorry," whispered Mr. Benedict.

The old man tried to rise. "Don't!" said Mr. Benedict, and held onto him.

"Let go of me!" said the old man.

"No," said Mr. Benedict. He reached for a hypodermic and stabbed the old man in the arm with it.

"You!" cried the old man, wildly, to all the sheeted figures. "Help me!"

He squinted blindly at the window, at the churchyard below with the leaning stones. "You, out there, too, under the stones, help! Listen!" The old man fell back, whistling and frothing. He knew he was dying. "All, listen," he babbled. "He's done this to me, and you, and you, all of you, he's done too much too long. Don't take it! Don't, don't let him do any more to anyone!"

The old man licked away the stuff from his lips, growing weaker. "Do something to him!"

Mr. Benedict stood there, shocked, and said, "They can't do anything to me. They can't. I say they can't."

"Out of your graves!" wheezed the old man. "Help me! Tonight, or tomorrow, or soon, but jump up and fix him, oh, this horrible man!" And he wept many tears.

"How foolish," said Mr. Benedict numbly. "You're dying and foolish." Mr. Benedict could not move his lips. His eyes were wide. "Go on and die now, quickly."

"Everybody up!" shouted the old man. "Everybody out!" "Help!"

"Please don't talk any more," said Mr. Benedict. "I really don't like to listen."

The room was suddenly very dark. It was night. It was getting late. The old man raved on and on, getting weaker. Finally, smiling, he said, "They've taken a lot from you, horrible man. Tonight, they'll do something."

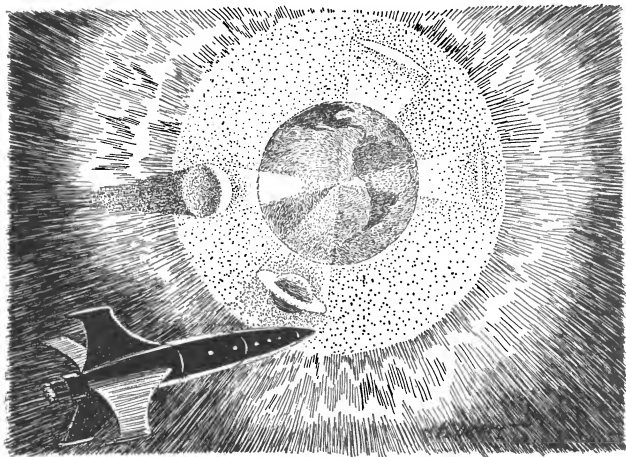
The old man died.

PEOPLE SAY THERE WAS an explosion that night in the graveyard. Or rather a series of explosions, a smell of strange things, a movement, a violence, a raving. There was much light and lightning, and a kind of rain, and the church bells hammered and slung about in the belfry, and stones toppled, and things swore oaths, and things flew through the air, and there was a chasing and a screaming, and many shadows and all the lights in the mortuary blazing on, and things moved inside and outside in swift jerks and shambles. Windows broke, doors were torn from hinges, leaves from trees, iron gates clattered, and in the end there was a picture of Mr. Benedict running

(Concluded on page 62)

TALKING TO THE STARS

an article by ELLERY LANIER



THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES, astronomers have been dreaming of building larger and larger telescopes. But even the giant 200-inch mirror at

Ellery Lanier has covered the frontiers of science from Cosmology to Spontaneous Generation. In childhood he kept snakes and spiders as pets and ground telescope mirrors while reading science-fiction. At college two of his major interests were Boolean Algebra and the works of A. N. Whitehead. After living with a tribe of Piute Indians in the Nevada desert, he worked with Andre Charlot in Hollywood, was a merchandising executive in a Fifth Avenue Department store, taught in a business school, was a Public Relations Consultant—he still is—and travelled extensively through Europe.

He has written numerous articles about the frontiers of science for various magazines. In collaboration with his wife, Lillian, he writes personality profiles and stories on industry for leading newspaper syndicates as well as magazines. Together they have logged around 500 hours of radio time on the Long John Nebel Show.

Mount Palomar is not powerful enough to see something the size of a man on the moon. The recent building of radio-telescopes has been a great advance, but that, too, has its limiting size.

But now an amazing concept put forth by Dr. W. J. Berger may provide the master key to the exploration of the universe. Dr. Berger's idea will make possible a telescope that can see to the very edge of the universe, and quite possibly beyond, by using the planets themselves as telescopic lenses. His ideas bring visions of human beings working like supermen, using the planets themselves as tools.

We will be able to listen in to as well as watch what is taking place on millions of other worlds and even be able to communicate with them. In truth—we will be able to talk to the stars. Only it will be a very long and dragging conversation.

©1959, by Ellery Lanier

"Tomorrow and tomorrow," wrote the Bard of Avon, "wends its way until the last syllable of recorded time." But are there any last syllables of Time or even of human speech? Certainly Shakespeare could not have answered that one . . . for he had no knowledge of modern astro-physics!

Sending a message to the nearest star and waiting for an answer will take about nine years.

Intelligent life on the planets of other stars may have been sending us millions of messages over the centuries which we have been unable to receive because of our technical primitiveness. There may even be millions of television messages winging their way toward us from millions of other worlds. These radio and television messages could not be received by the most powerful telescopes we could ever build on earth.

It would take a telescope with a lens having a diameter as wide as the earth itself—or wider—to receive them. With Dr. Berger's ideas it will no longer be necessary to build such a huge lens. The earth itself will serve as the lens.

This is no dream of a hashish-smoking astronomer. The theoretical details have been worked out and receiving equipment for planetary lenses may be standard equipment on future satellites.

Because it uses the most powerful of all possible lenses, this field has been named the Ultimate Astronomy. Most astronomers confronted with a description of such a telescope can be expected to register a long double take and look for the nearest man in a white jacket. But if they consider the idea carefully, they will have to admit that it is legitimate. As crazy as it sounds, the idea is scientifically sound, and can become a not-too-distant reality.

This fantastic kind of astronomy is made possible by using more than just light rays or radio waves. It also uses lenses that bend light by gravitational fields. The way a gravity lens works can best be explained by recalling the history-making experiment that tested Einstein's Relativity Theory. Pictures taken during the solar eclipse of 1922 showed a displacement of the star images passing near the sun which was in accord with the predictions of Einstein's Theory. They seemed to prove that the sun's mass had caused a distortion of the gravitational field in the space around it, and pulled the light rays out of position in space.

It doesn't take too much imagination to realize that this is exactly what happens when we look at something through a magnifying glass. Only in this case the lens is a gravitational one! But the same principle applies, for with a glass lens, it is also necessary to find the correct focal length in

order to make effective use of the instrument. The focal point in a gravitational lens is somewhere in outer space and can be reached by space ships.

For this almost beyond science fiction concept, Dr. Berger created the awesome name of "Celestial Iconospherics". Basically, the idea is that by the principles of physical optics, as accepted at present, any large ball-shaped object such as a planet or star, will work as a camera or telescopic lens. It will project pictures of almost everything in the universe. What happens is that instead of going through the solid center of such a lens, the electromagnetic waves as well as the gravity-bent waves are bent by another sphere which is like a huge shell surrounding the star or planet.

This planetary skin is virtually a doughnut-shaped lens with an opaque center, which does not interfere with the efficiency of the lens at all. The focused picture is projected onto another imaginary shell at a distance from the planet or star. This larger shell is called the "Iconosphere" from *Icon* for *image*, and *sphere* for the imaginary film or viewing surface of the ball. Every celestial body has many of these Iconospheres.

To use this new astronomy it is only necessary to get a space craft into position on the desired focal length around a world and use an eyepiece or camera. The most powerful of earth-built telescopes could never hope to record for us the extremely fine images that this kind of telescope can produce. Also it will be rather easy to observe the planets of other star systems.

Earth itself should make an excellent lens. Earth could act like a refractive lens, not even needing to depend on gravitational distortion. The atmosphere around the earth is a most excellent light-bending instrument. It is a common experience to see the light-bending powers of air on a hot day or in desert mirages. A satellite at the right distance from Earth could easily use the visible atmospheric ring of the planet itself as a lens. Since this ring is so huge, it hardly matters that the earth in its center blocks out so much of the view.

Worlds like our moon cannot be used as atmospheric lenses because they lack an atmosphere, and there can be no bending of the light rays. The moon would be quite effective, however, as a radio-wave lens.

Atmosphere worlds like our earth are, in a sense, crystal balls with a small opaque center. These crystal balls look out at the universe in all directions at one time, and the imaginary shells where their images are projected mirror continuously almost everything in the universe. They constitute a kind of continuously unreeling cavalcade of what is happening everywhere. The crystal ball is a true cosmic eye.

The sharp, clean pictures such a lens will produce are amazing, because the clearness of a photographic image depends on the resolving power of a lens. The resolving power is measured by the ratio of the size of the light waves to the diameter of the lens. The wider the lens on a camera, the more detailed the details on the film. The difference in size between the earth's atmospheric diameter and the size of a light wave is so great that the detailing power of such a lens will be fantastically high.

We can expect some fantastic pictures to come from the first space ship to successfully cruise the Earth's Iconosphere with a receiving camera.

For the highest kind of power it will be possible to use both the earth and the moon as the front and back lenses of a telescope. It will have to use radio waves instead of light, since the moon's lack of atmosphere rules out light waves. The same double planet and moon technique can be used with the other moon-bearing planets as well. Most of the moons are well within the Iconospheres of their planets. The magnification power would be increased tremendously but the amount of area covered would be cut down, since the area would depend on where the moon happened to be at any particular time. With such high power it could take a million or more years for a non-aging astronomer just to take a look at all the corners of the universe.

The viewing space ship need not even have a crew aboard. A television transmitter could do as well. The ship could cruise around the entire picture shell and send back a total document of the universe visible from that particular point in all directions. By having two space ships encircle two different planets at opposite ends of the solar system we might be able to take real, three-dimensional pictures of the universe itself which would answer many unsolved problems—and probably bring up a host of new problems hitherto undreamed of.

Before we visit the other planets it might be wise to do a fully detailed reconnaissance inspection of their surfaces by using our own earth as a lens. By using film sensitive to the red wave lengths we could make picture-taking very easy. When our sun is setting on the horizon, the red wave lengths are bent through nearly half a degree of arc while passing through the atmosphere. This small amount of light bending becomes tremendous when you consider the size of the entire atmosphere.

The lens produced will be very strong. It focuses a very sharp picture on a shell some 458,000

miles from the earth. On this picture shell, the sun is magnified to about 4000 miles, Jupiter to about 89 miles, Mars to about 33 miles, and the nearer stars to about 500 feet.

In addition to recording man-sized images on the surface of the planets, this fantastic power could bring into view the planets encircling other stars. The thirty-three mile picture of Mars is incredible when it is realized that the most powerful telescopes used today hardly make Mars appear much larger than a little marble.

The picture shells caused by radio waves instead of light waves will be useful in enabling us to see through the great clouds of cosmic gas that hang like a black curtain between us and many parts of the universe. Certain of the radio waves coming from the stars are very weak when received on the surface of the earth but they can be expected to have a very powerful image when brought to a focus by a planetary lens.

To prove that there are intelligent beings on other planets around other suns it will only be necessary to intercept the information-carrying types of radio waves, and decode them by already established methods.

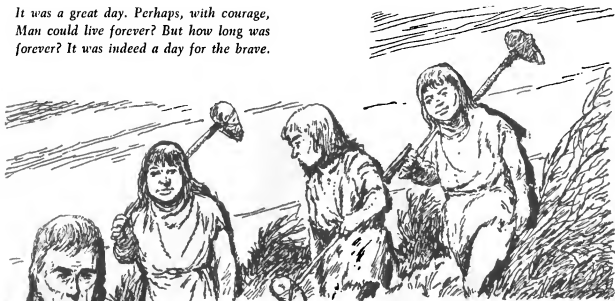
The wildest part of this project is that we can easily reverse this process. A radio transmitter can be placed into a space ship and sent into position on the Iconosphere of Earth for example. Then by sending a signal toward Earth, we would use the searchlight principle to focus our outgoing message.

Our signal could be focused by the earth's iconosphere and it would travel without spreading out, with almost its entire strength undiminished, across the universe to the stars. This huge searchlight beam would be much more powerful than anything we could ever hope to build on earth in the way of focusing antennas, since it would be a great deal wider than the earth itself. Indeed, the sun might prove to be a better transmitting lens-antenna than the earth. The possibility arises of sending radar to the stars. At the speed of light—or radio—a period of nine years would pass before we could get a bounced back radar impulse from the stars. There would be an incredible problem of determining beforehand where the stars would be in four years in the future when the radar hits them and where we would be nine years in the future when the radar returns.

What makes this Ultimate Astronomy so completely awesome is the realization that, since we are capable of sending messages to the stars, there is a tremendously high probability that intelligent life on other worlds has also achieved this technique and may have been trying to talk to us through the ages.

The first space ship to cruise around a Celestial Iconograph may find a vast accumulation of dead letter messages waiting to be received and interpreted. The 'Infinitely Valued Jack-Pot' question is—"What have they been trying to tell us, and what might they be saying to us now?"

*It was a great day. Perhaps, with courage,
Man could live forever? But how long was
forever? It was indeed a day for the brave.*



THEY LIVE FOREVER

by LLOYD BIGGLE, Jr.



BEFORE HE STEPPED OUT of his hut into the clear morning air, Mathews repeated his calculations of the night before. The result was the same. In Earth-time, this was the Day. And if it were not, if an error had crept into his records down through the years, this particular day was close enough. It would do.

He stood looking at the village below him, at the laboriously-cultivated fields on the lower slope, at the peacefully grazing *zauyi*, some of which were still being milked. From the village street the little chief saw him, and raised both hands. Mathews returned the greeting, and took the down path.

The chief approached him humbly. "Is your Day of Days satisfactory?"

Mathews looked down at the breath-taking panorama this strange planet served him each morning with his breakfast. The haze of ground mist was shot through with riotous colors that drifted and spread and changed before his unbelieving eyes. Without warning the jungle would suddenly flip into the sky and hang above itself in a dazzling, inverted mirage. In the distance the broad surface of a mighty river mirrored the pink-tinted clouds of early morning. The sight awed and stirred Mathews as it had on thousands of other mornings, and

as it would each morning as long as his eyes served him.

"The Day is satisfactory," he told the chief.

The chief gave a little grunt of satisfaction, and shouted a command.

From nearby huts came warriors, eight, ten, a dozen. They carried an odd miscellany of weapons, and Mathews was responsible for many of them—spears, blowpipes, a boomerang, bows and arrows, and odd items that Mathews had invented. They were a resourceful people, these *Rualis*—quick, intelligent and brave. They reacted with rare enthusiasm to a new idea.

Women came forth to approach Mathews with shy respect. They bowed before him with their gifts. He accepted a skin of sweet wine, bread cakes, and pieces of dried meat. A whispered request, and a small boy scurried into a hut and returned with a hoe.

"The Day waits," Mathews said. He took the downward trail, and the *Rualis* marched behind him, singing lustily.

They moved quickly down the cool, sunny mountain slope, and the torrid heat of the jungle rolled up in waves to meet them. The natives moved ahead of him when they reached the jungle path. It was a custom, almost a ritual, that they should precede him into the jungle, to protect him from the nameless terrors that lurked there. Mathews had never seen these terrors, and frankly doubted their existence, but he never protested. His ability to yield graciously on matters that were really unimportant was one reason for his success with these people.

The Tree was their objective. It had been a forest giant when Mathews first saw it—fifty-eight years before, by his calculations. The Tree held some mysterious significance for the natives which he had never fathomed. They conducted ceremonies there, and their dancing kept a broad, circular track cleared. But they never invited his presence, and he never attempted to intrude.

The *Rualis* seated themselves in a circle about the tree. They had removed their clothing, and perspiration glistened on their sun-tanned bodies. Insects swarmed around them. Mathews waved his hand in a friendly salute, and turned off the jungle trail. The path he followed was faint, overgrown, almost obliterated. The *Rualis* never used it, and it had been ten days since his last visit.

He moved a dozen yards into the jungle, slashing at the undergrowth with his hoe, and reached a small clearing. He seated himself on the ground, and drank deeply from the wine skin. Insects droned incessantly overhead, colossal insects, but they did not bother him. That was one of the many mysteries of this strange planet. The insects plagued the *Rualis*, but ignored the Earthman.

Back at the Tree, the *Rualis* continued their singing. The song tossed swingingly on the breeze, backed up by intricate thumping on a dried *liayu* fruit. Mathews suspected that they were a highly musical people, though he knew too little about music himself to share their extreme pleasure in it.

He pushed the wine skin aside, and chewed solemnly on a piece of meat, feeling a deep, relax-

ing peace within himself. It was his Day—his birthday, by Earth-time, as well as he had been able to keep it. It was also, by a coincidence he had often pondered down through the years, the anniversary of the tragedy that had placed him on this planet.

The ship had crashed on his sixteenth birthday. It rested somewhere in front of him, hidden by the impenetrable curtain of green. Long years before, the roaring jungle had swallowed it up in its clinging, rusting embrace. It had been years—decades, even—since Mathews had last hacked his way through to visit it. Now he was content to leave it undisturbed. There was nothing entombed there except memories, and the clearing had memories enough to satisfy him.

On the other side of the clearing were the graves—six of them, side by side. At one end Mathews had buried his grandfather. At the other end rested the mortal remains of old Wurr, the immortal man who was not immune to accidents. Between them lay the four-man crew of the *Fountain of Youth*.

"Seven is a lucky number," his grandfather had said. "Come along, and bring us luck." So Mathews had come, and brought luck only for himself. Of the seven, he alone had survived the crash.

At the time the *Fountain of Youth* set forth bravely for the far reaches of the galaxy, he'd had little understanding of his grandfather's quest. The adventure, the excitement was enough. He hadn't particularly cared whether they reached their objective or not.

Now he was an old man, and he understood—too well. It was not an idle whim that led his grandfather to name the new star ship *Fountain of Youth*. Grandfather Mathews quite literally sought the source of eternal life, but his objective was a planet of youth, rather than a fountain. He sought the home of old Wurr.

Wurr, the kindly old immortal! Mathews' memory could still search back over the years and bring him vividly to life. Bushy hair, black, twinkling eyes, low, husky voice, he never seemed anything but ordinary.

And the known facts about him were nothing less than staggering.

Wurr had survived a precipitous arrival on Earth when the space ship on which he was a passenger plunged into the Pacific Ocean. Wurr was found bobbing on the surface in a space suit, the only survivor. He was a mature man then, and from that day until he left Earth on the *Fountain of Youth*, three hundred and seventy-two years had elapsed. That much was documented history.

During those centuries he had not aged perceptibly. Doctors examined him, and x-rayed him, and studied him repeatedly, and their only comment was a rather frustrating shrug of the shoulders. He was an ordinary man, with a single difference.

He lived forever.

Ordinary man and immortal man, man of simple, unaffected habits, man of mystery. He was a sly and candid observer of the human scene. Historians sought him out—an eye-witness of more than three centuries of Earth's history. He submit-

ted willingly to examinations, but he balked at answering questions. He was no different, he said, from anyone else—where he came from.

Grandfather Mathews became acquainted with him, and reached a conclusion on a subject that had been giving rise to much speculation ever since Wurr had completed his first hundred years on Earth. Wurr's home was a planet of immortality, a planet of perpetual youth.

Supposing an alien, a native of Earth, were to visit that Planet. Would he receive the gift of immortality? Grandfather Mathews conferred with Wurr. The immortal man was reluctant. He liked Earth. Eventually Grandfather Mathews convinced him, and the *Fountain of Youth* expedition was born. Earth had lately developed star travel, and Wurr knew with the exactitude of a skilled navigator the stellar location of his home planet in the Constellation Scorpio. Grandfather Mathews was confident.

Mathews understood, now, that the old man had not taken him along as a whim. He had frankly sought immortal life for himself, but he was a practical old fellow. He admitted the possibility that he might already be too old, too near to death, to be redeemed by the powers of that miraculous planet. But his grandson, only a boy in his teens—surely the planet could work the miracle for him!

That was the legacy the old man had sought for Mathews. Not wealth, not prestige, but immortality. Mathews gazed at the six graves with a searing pang of regret. Perhaps the bones had already dissolved in the moist jungle soil, but he carefully tended the graves as a lasting monument to his own loss, to a loss that seemed more tragic with each passing year as his life drew to a close, to the loss of life itself. But for the stupid accident, he might have achieved that which men of Earth had dreamed of for as long as there had been dreams.

And life was good. Even on this savage planet it was good. He had been too young when he arrived to feel deeply the loss of the civilized splendors of Earth. His very youth had given him much in common with the child-like *Rualis*. He had enjoyed love and laughter, the hunt, the occasional, half-coming tribal war. He had helped the *Rualis* to become strong, and they gave him lasting honor.

Life was good, and it was beating its measured way to the inevitable end, to the damp soil of the jungle. And it might have been otherwise.

MATHEWS GOT WEARILY TO HIS FEET, and went to work with the clumsy, stone-bladed hoe. He cleared the green shoots from around the headstones he had carved with such care so many years ago. The mounds had to be reshaped after every rainy season. The jungle was perennially encroaching upon the clearing. The open ground had been much larger in his younger days, but as he grew older he allowed the jungle to creep back. Now it seemed a struggle to hold the space remaining.

There were times when he thought he should remove the graves to a high, dry place on the mountain side. But this place seemed to belong to them, and they to it—here, where their quest had ended, hundreds of light-years from Wurr's planet of immortality, wherever it might be.

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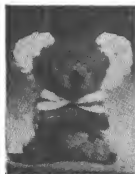
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by **POUL ANDERSON**

He could not work long in the savage jungle heat. He gathered up his things, and followed the faint trail back to the Tree. Still singing, the *Rualis* took their places behind him, and he led them out of the jungle.

The climb up the slope seemed harder with each trip. When he reached the village he was quite content to sit down and rest, and watch the children play, before he attempted the steep path to his own hut. He held a special affection for the village children, and they for him. Perhaps, he thought, it was because none of his wives had been able to bear him children, though when he gave them to men of their own race they always proved fertile. It was as though fate were not content with denying him physical immortality, and must also cut him off from the perpetuity that children could have secured for him. In his more bitter moments he believed that the six who died had been dealt with more kindly.

But he had to admit that life was good. The *Rualis* were an attractive, graceful, light-skinned people—small of stature, much smaller than he, but sturdy and strong. The children matured with astonishing rapidity. It was only three Earth years from birth to adolescence, and then, alas, perhaps another seven or eight years from maturity to death. The *Rualis* who reached the age of fifteen, by Earth standards, were rare. Mathews had watched many generations come and go, and he'd had wives from every generation, but no children. He had long since given up the thought of children.

When he had rested, he got to his feet and walked slowly down the village street. A child caught his attention, a girl, and even among the charming *Rualis* children her beauty was exceptional. With a smile, he stopped to admire her.

The mother appeared in the doorway of the hut, and turned aside shyly when she saw him. "You have a beautiful child," Mathews said to her. "She is the image of her great-great grandmother. Or perhaps it was her great-great-great-grandmother—I do not recall exactly. But she, too, was a beautiful child."

The mother was pleased, but held herself apart with proper good manners. The child pratted excitedly. "Today is my birth festival," she told Mathews.

He said gravely, "Today is also my birth festival."

The child seemed startled. "What is your age, Earthman?"

Mathews smiled wistfully. How was he to explain seventy-four Earth years to this child? And the *Rualis* had no number large enough to embrace the quantity of the fifty-seven day months they called years that Mathews' life had spanned.

"I do not know," he said. "I cannot remember."

He turned, and sought the path to his hut . . .

The child watched him until he disappeared. "Mother," she said, "Why does the Earthman not know his age?"

"Hush," the mother said soothingly. "Age does not matter to the Earthman. Like the Tree, his lives forever."

THE HANDLER by RAY BRADBURY

(Concluded from page 55)

about, vanishing, the lights out, suddenly, and a tortured scream that could only be from Mr. Benedict himself.

After that—nothing. Quiet.

The town people entered the mortuary the next morning. They searched the mortuary building and the church, and then they went out into the graveyard.

And they found nothing but blood, a vast quantity of blood, sprinkled and thrown and spread everywhere you could possibly look, as if the heavens had bled profusely in the night.

But not a sign of Mr. Benedict.

"Where could he be?" everybody wondered.

"How should we know?" everybody replied, confounded.

And then they had the answer.

Walking through the graveyard they stood in deep tree shadows where the stones, row on row, were old and time-erased and leaning. No birds sang in the trees. The sunlight which finally managed to pierce the thick leaves, was like a light-bulb illumination, weak, frail, unbelievable, theatrical, thin.

They stopped by one tombstone.

"Here, now!" they exclaimed.

Others paused and bent over the grayish, moss-flecked stone, and cried out.

Freshly scratched, as if by feebly, frantic, hasty fingers (in fact, as if scratched by fingernails the writing was *that* new) was the name: MR. BENEDICT.

"Look over here!" someone else cried. Everybody turned. "This one, this stone, and this one, and this one, too!" cried the villager, pointing to five other gravestones.

Everybody hurried around, looking and recoiling.

Upon each and every stone, scratched by fingernail scratchings, the same message appeared: MR. BENEDICT.

The town people were stunned.

"But that's impossible," objected one of them, faintly. "He *couldn't* be buried under *all* these gravestones!"

They stood there for one long moment. Instinctively they all looked at one another nervously in the silence and the tree darkness. They all waited for an answer. With fumbling senseless lips, one of them replied, simply: "Couldn't he?"

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Here's why we make this offer. About ten years ago, my colleagues and I realized that too many people were missing wonderful careers in art . . . either because they hesitated to think they had talent . . . or because they couldn't get top-notch professional art training without leaving home or giving up their jobs.

A Plan to Help Others

We decided to do something about this. First, we pooled the rich, practical experience; the professional know-how; and the precious trade secrets that helped us reach the top. Then — illustrating this knowledge with over 5,000 special drawings and paintings — we created a complete course of art training that folks all over the country could take right in their own homes and in their spare time.

Our training has helped thousands of men and women win the creative satisfactions and the cash rewards of part-time or full-time art careers. Here are just a few:

Don Smith lives in New Orleans. Three years ago Don knew nothing about art — even doubted he had talent. Today, he is an illustrator with a leading advertising agency — and has a future as big as he wants to make it.

Helps Design New Cars

Halfway through our training, Don Coleman of Detroit landed a job in the styling department of a major automobile company. Now he helps design new car models.

Harriet Kuzniewski was bored with an "ordinary" job when she sent for our talent test. Soon after she began our training, she was offered a job as a fashion artist. A year later, she became assistant art director of a big buying office.

John Whitaker of Memphis was an airline clerk when he began studying with us. Recently, a huge syndicate signed him to do a daily comic strip.

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Donald Kern — a Montana cowboy — studied with us. Now he paints portraits, sells them for \$250 each. And he gets all the business he can handle.

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